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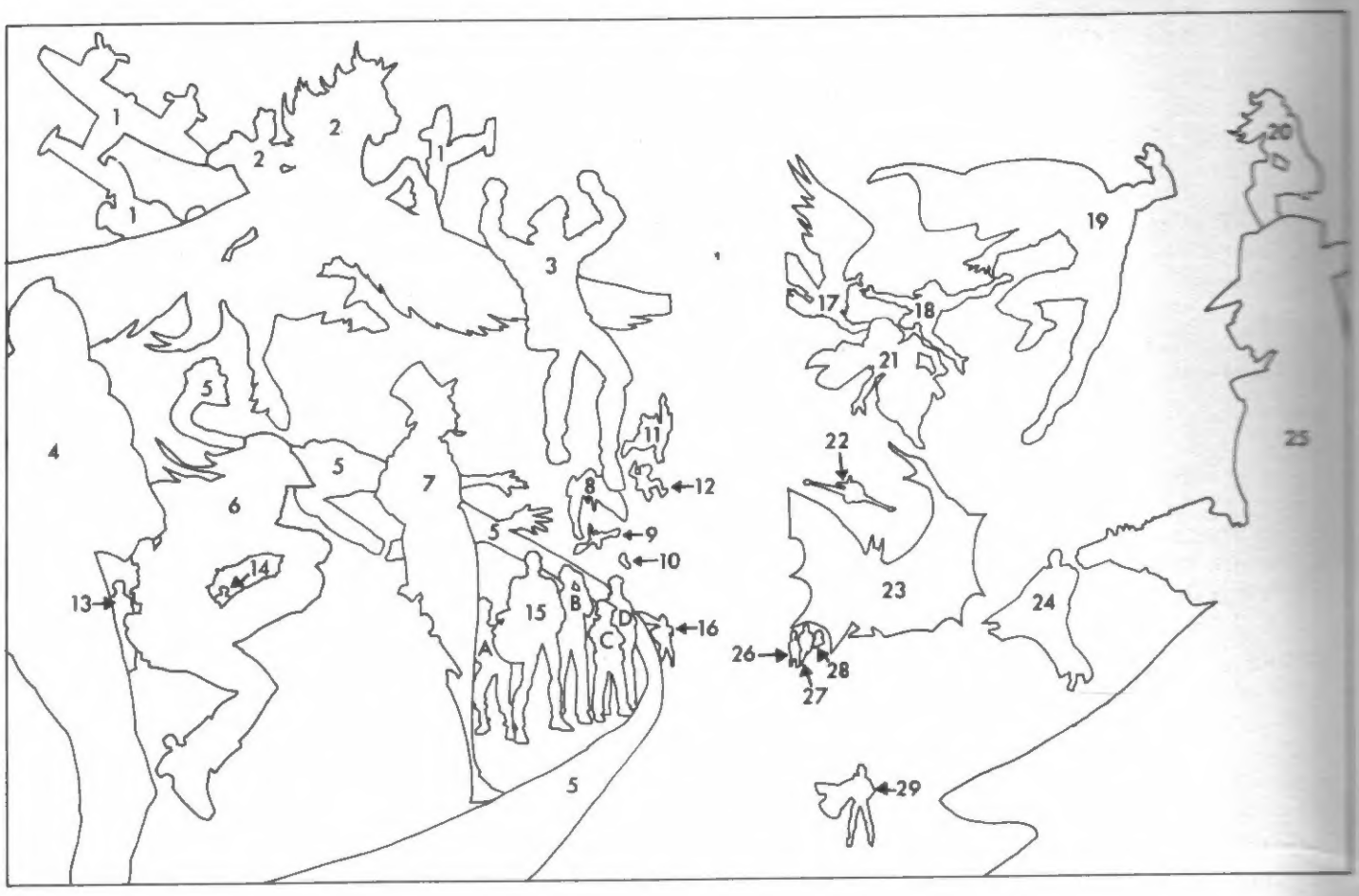

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ROOTS OF THE GOLDEN AGE

by **Skip Kirkland**

Do you know who the very first comic book heroes were? **Superman, Batman, Green Lantern**, characters like that, right? **Wrong**, O seeker of the truth! **Slam Bradley, Buck Marshal, Speed Saunders**—they were the first. **Cosmo, Capt. Desmo, Boomerang Jones**—all carried on the relentless war against universal badness long before young Kal-el crash-landed in Smallville and single-handedly transformed comics into a full-fledged industry. Who were these irrepressible, unsung stalwarts? What were comics like **before** the dawning of the Age of Gold? Let's investigate.

Comics had existed as an artistic medium in many forms before that eventful January of 1937 when **Detective Comics** #1, the first comic book dedicated entirely to predominant characters and a single theme, hit the stands. One could cite the ancient Egyptians as being the founding fathers of the comics medium. It was over 3,000 years ago that they drew their hieroglyphics on the walls of their tombs and, more importantly, on the first paper, papyrus.

Down through the centuries comics have been used by some of the greatest minds known to mankind to put across an idea, and make people react emotionally. (Our own Ben Franklin used cartoons frequently in his publications to illustrate his lofty ideas—could he have been the first Woodchuck? Hmm?)

Sources differ on the subject of exactly what was the absitively, posolutely very **first** comic book. Could it have been England's **PUNCH**, published as a pamphlet in the 17th century? Was it the infamous **MAX AND MAURICE**, printed as a booklet and imported (deported?) to the USA from Germany in 1870? Was it the 1911 publication of some old **MUTT AND JEFF** plates in book form by the Chicago **AMERICAN** newspaper? Or maybe it was "Comics on Parade", printed for advertising purposes by Gulf Oil Company in 1932?

In any case, the first comic book produced in it's present form arrived in 1933. 1933, what a year **that** was! Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, FDR enacted his New Deal policy to end the depression, Amendment 21 to the Constitution ended Prohibition, and **FUNNIES ON PARADE** appeared on the scene.

Owing to the success and popularity of this publication, which consisted of reprinted newspaper funnies distributed free of charge to popularize it's publisher's products, other companies saw in this unique medium a golden opportunity to push their own products. Other comic books began to spring up, seemingly overnight:

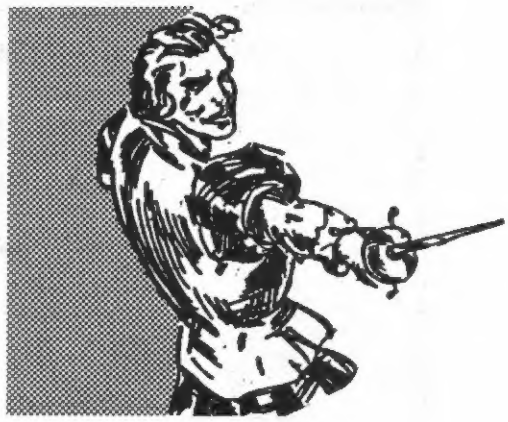
. . . including one called **FAMOUS FUNNIES** . . . which, incidentally, had color separation work done by DC's own Sol Harrison. As an experiment, some copies of this book were labeled with a 10¢ price tag and placed on a few newstands. Over a single weekend, they were completely sold out!

Publishers, who were not slow to realize the monetary potential of the medium, began churning out these comic books faster than the proverbial speeding bullet. The years 1934-1936 saw the emergence of such titles as **NEW FUN, TIP-TOP COMICS, KING COMICS** and **POPULAR COMICS**, to name just a few. But yet, something was wrong, something was lacking. These comic books still followed the newspaper format. The public demanded more for their dime.

And, lo, the call went forth and was answered. From the fledgling offices of NPP came a black and white and color comic book dedicated to a single theme. That theme was Detectives. The rest was history.

What shall we call that fast and furious year and a half, from January 1937 through June 1938, after the birth of **DETECTIVE COMICS** and before the birth of Supes and the Golden Age? In those short 18 months, practically ever genre, every plot motif, and every thematic device that are used in the comics we know and love today, were given their first exposure. A brief examination of the predominant genres employed in the comic books of this period will prove this to be so. In examining these comics one is asked to keep in mind the year that they were composed, and to remember that, like the comics, our attitudes have changed since 1937.

Westerns: Through the innocent eye of the motion picture camera, Americans saw the taming of the frontier as high adventure. Nowhere, perhaps, was the line more clearly drawn between good and evil than in the serialized westerns. Comic books reflected this popular trend through such strips as **Captain Jim of the Texas Rangers** in **Adventure Comics**, and **Buck Marshal, Range Detective**. Rustlers, range wars, cattlemen vs sodbusters, gunslingers vs lawmen, "head'em off at the pass," all of these devices had a home in



CAPTAIN QUICK

these comics. I'm sure **Jonah Hex** and **The Vigilante** both owe a debt of gratitude to their intrepid forefathers for blazing a trail for them in the four color west.

Historical Romance: Did Joe Kubert's famous **Viking Prince** have it's inspirational beginings in Anthony's **Vikings**, a strip which chronicled the battles of Prince Ivar against the wicked Druids? In any case, if anyone were said to be the major exponent of this genre it would have to be the gifted artist Sven Elven. His **Captain Quick, Robin Hood**, and **Heroes of History** exhibited an inspired style of art that could easily grace the pages of the masterpieces of today. As a brief example of this artist's far-reaching technique, in one **Captain Quick** episode, "Foe of the Borgias," in **New Adventure Comics** #2 (later to become simply **Adventure Comics**), there appears what might very well be the first full page spread in a serialized comic strip format.

Buck
MARSHALL
RANGE
DETECTIVE
BY
H. FLEMING
· BULLET BLUFF ·
BUCK MARSHALL, RANGE DETECTIVE, LOOSENS HIS SIX-GUN IN ITS HOLSTER AS HE HEARS THE RAPID TATTOO OF PONY HOOFS ON THE STONY BOTTOM OF THE VALLEY TRAIL..

Illustrated Classics: In the time honored tradition of the great English poet Wm. Blake, who first set upon the idea of illustrating his own poetry, we find in the pages of these pre-Golden Age comics some of the most popular poems of all time embellished by the artwork of our own master-craftsmen. "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "Pochahontas," and "Abou Ben Adhem," were but three of the reknowned poems set to pen and ink and given a full page.

But, more importantly to the development of comics, we find in these pre-Golden Agers the first attempts at a "Classics Illustrated" type strip, the greatest of these being Merna Gamble's superb rendition of Charles Dickens' **A Tale of Two Cities** which began in **New Adventure Comics** #1.

G-Men: Long before James Bond, Our Man Flint and the Men from U.N.C.L.E. there existed **The Feds**. These fearless Government agents waged perpetual war against the dope dealers, organized criminals, and those who would subvert our National Security. **Speed Saunders** was such a man, he and his River Patrol kept our nation's coastlines safe and sound issue after issue. In my opinion the greatest and most important G-Man was **Bart Regan**, later known simply as **Spy**. I feel this strip is so important because in it we find the precusory relationship to the famous Superman/Lois Lane /Perry White triangle. Bart Regan loved Sally but could not marry her because of his dedication to his duty and his boss, The Chief. Sound somewhat familiar? It ought to . . . **Bart Regan** was a creation of the up and coming team of Siegel and Shuster, the creators of Superman.

FIRST ISSUE

(Interesting aside dept.: In the Siegel and Shuster G-Man strip **Steve Carson**, appearing in the first issue of **New Adventure Comics**, Steve views the future through a time-scope and sees an age wherein G-Men of the future use super-science to combat intergalactic crime. The ace sleuth of the Service in this future period just happens to be named **Jor-L!** Velly intelesting!)

Detectives: The most influential detective of this period would have to be Sven Elven's **Cosmo, the Phantom of Disguise**. He was the first comic book hero to employ the use of disguises in order to thwart his foes, thus making him a distant relative of the **Darknight Detective, Batman.**

Adventure: Under this broad heading I have lumped those strips dealing with exotic adventure in far-flung ports-of-call and the Yellow Peril type strips. In the first category we find such heroes as **Boomerang Jones of the South Seas**, who with his faithful companion Mungo, fought the good fight in, you guessed it, the South Seas. There was **Tod Hunter, Jungle Master**, who, with his faithful companion Tommy, let'em have it in, that's right, the Jungle. And let us not forget **Captain Desmo**, who, with his faithful flight helmet and goggles, beat up on the baddies from one corner of the world to the other.

The Claws of the Red Dragon, rendered by the fantastic Tom Hickey, gives us the best example of the Yellow Peril genre. In episode after episode the undaunted Bruce Nelson saved the lovely, but illusive blonde Sigrid von Holtzendorf from the nefarious

COSMO, PHANTOM OF DISGUISE

clutches of caricatured and stereotyped "chinamen." The language was coarse and often brutal, but, as was previously mentioned, those were the times. Let us pray that such attitudes are gone for good.

Chinese weren't all bad, though. There was **Mr. Chang**, by WIN, an interesting ancestor to current Kung-Fu strips. Mr. Chang, with his four weapons, a pistol, a knife, a hatchet and a stun ray, was "a wealthy oriental—a master sleuth whose hobby is the science of criminology."

HOW IT STARTED NO ONE KNOWS — OR CARES! OF SOLE INTEREST IS THAT SLAM BRADLEY, HARD-BOILED PRIVATE DICK AND PETE GRAVES, TOUGH STEEL WORKER, ARE ENGAGED IN A FISTIC BATTLE THAT THREATENS TO MAKE HISTORY! SLUGGING, SLAMMING, SOCKING, THE TWO POUND MERCILESSLY AT EACH OTHER, GIVING NO QUARTER, EXPECTING NONE. THEIR ABILITY TO TAKE PUNISHMENT IS ALMOST MIRACULOUS! YET NO ILL FEELING EXISTS BETWEEN THE TWO. LIKE GLADIATORS OF OLD THEY GLORY IN THE COMBAT FOR SHEER LOVE OF BATTLE!

Aside from these predominant genres, the comic books of this period were filled with articles on Hollywood, illustrated short stories, puzzles, games and, of course, cartoons. **Chikko Chakko, Laughing at Life, Ol Oz Bopp, Don Coyote, Sam the Porter** and Leo E. O'Mealia's fantastic **Andy Handy—A Man of Action, but Few Words** were just a few of the many colorful cartoon strips that were interspersed throughout the mags. Bob Kane, the creator of **Batman**, had two cartoon strips of his own—**Rusty and His Pals**, and **Professor Doolittle**.

Before parting, let us doff our hats for a moment to the greatest of the pre-Golden Age heroes, the irrepressible **Slam Bradley**, created by none other than Siegel and Shuster. A he-man's he-man, all brawn in a ripped shirt, Slam punched his way into comic history giving us the first comic strip that stressed above all else, **action**. You were the first real daredevil, Slam. All you lacked was a costume. Here's lookin' atcha, big fella . . . you could take on all these fancy pants dudes today, without battin' an eye.

And that's the way it was **40** years ago. 62 big pages, for only a dime. Over the years the only thing that has hardly changed at all is the ad pages. Yep, X-ray specs, ventriloquism, Win Big Prizes, BB guns . . . you could find them all advertised in the earliest comic books. Some traditions, it seems, are imperishable.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

QUALITY IS THEIR MIDDLE NAME

by **Roger Klorese**

Doll Man! Phantom Lady! The Ray! The Black Condor! The Human Bomb! Uncle Sam! You know them as **The Freedom Fighters**, the superhero survivors from Earth-X, a world where World War II did not end in 1945, but where the Nazis took the upper hand and the flames of combat smouldered on. At least, they did until the summer of 1974, when the combined efforts of the **FFers, The Justice League** of Earth-One and **The Justice Society** of Earth-Two brought peace, as well as the freedom for which the Earth-X heroes took their name, to a decimated world.

But a world without citizens is hardly in need of heroes. Learning about the existence of parallel Earths from their meeting with the **JLA**, and **JSA, The Freedom Fighters** took off through a dimension-warp for Earth-One. They hoped to return to their superheroic lives, the way they had lived on Earth-X before the war. But the machinations and schemes of a costumed criminal called the Silver Ghost has put the **FFers** afoul of the law in their adopted home of New York City. Today, the only freedom for which they fight is their own.

Before they were called **The Freedom Fighters**, though, **Uncle Sam** and the rest were but a few among the roster of heroes to whom quality was not just a watchword, but their **name** as well. Their adventures were published by **Quality Comics**, who also brought us **Blackhawk, Plastic Man**, and a certain legendary crimefighter in business suit and domino mask whose adventures were quite **Spirit**-ed. (Ouch.)

Quality began publishing reprinted newspaper strips, as almost all of the Golden Age publishers did, in 1937. Publisher E. M. ("Busy") Arnold, in October of that year, released the first issue of **Feature Funnies**. As time went by, new original material was added, and in the 27th issue of the title (by then renamed **Feature Comics**), the age of the Quality superhero began. And it started small.

The first Quality superhero was small in stature, but not in popularity, or in staying power either. His name was **Doll Man**. In his everyday identity he was Darrel Dane. Unlike DC's modern **Atom** or the other mini-heroes, **Doll Man** needed no super-scientific gimmicks to reduce to his fighting size of five inches. No, all he had to do was **think** himself down to size.

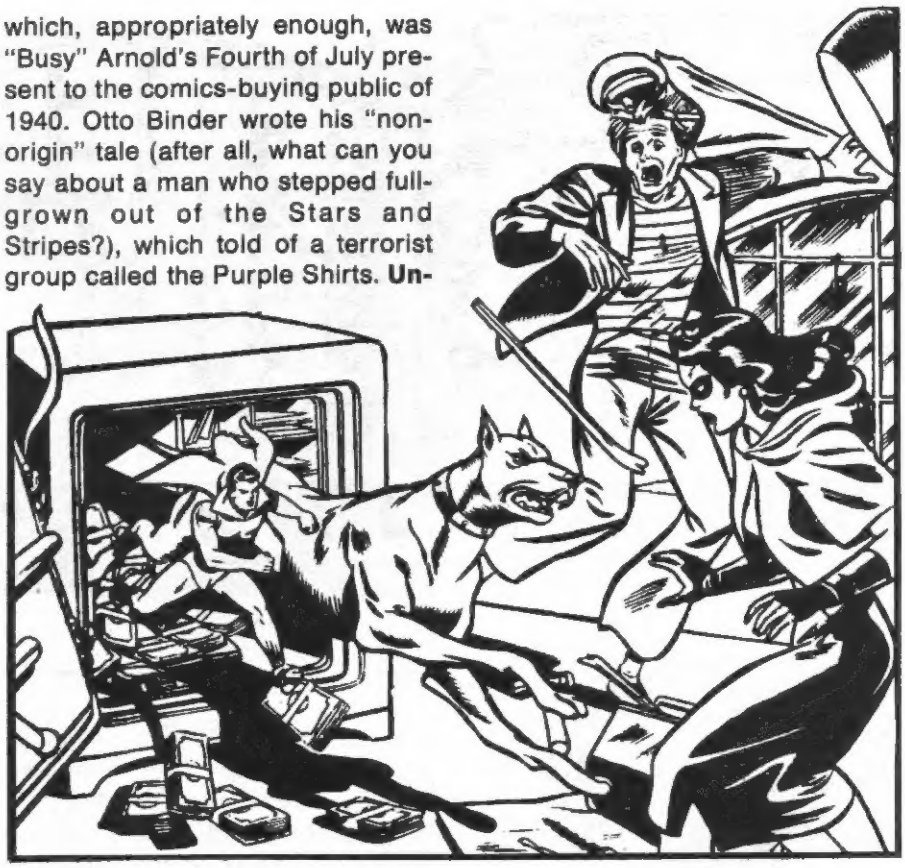
The appeal of **Doll Man's** adventures surely had to do with the same thing which made the TV series "Land of the Giants" so interesting, the triumph of the "little man" over bigger foes and the menace of common, everyday objects grown into deadly traps. **Doll Man** was always facing cats and spiders as well as crooks; he was trapped in bird cages and sewers more times than anyone can remember; and for transportation, just about any moving object would do, from roller-skates to toy planes to his trusty dog-"steed", Elmo. He kept his full fighting strength at doll-size, to cope with enemies a dozen times his height.

He was joined in his adventures by scientist Dr. Roberts and his daughter Martha. Martha was Darrel's fiancee and, beginning in the early fifties, his partner as **Doll Girl**, having somehow gained the power to shrink as well. This, of course, was the Martha Roberts of Earth-X, not the one currently appearing in **Freedom Fighters**, who is the Earth-One Martha. (For the lowdown on how Darrel learned

how to change sizes, check out **Feature Comics** #27, the December 1939 issue. Or if you find yourself short the few hundred dollars or so collectors are asking these days for that landmark issue, you'll find **Doll Man's** origin retold in **Freedom Fighters** #10, the somewhat more recent, and somewhat more available, October 1977 issue.)

Doll Man was the creation of Will Eisner, who, along with Jack Kirby, Charles Biro and Gardner Fox was one of the top idea-factories of the Golden Age of Comics. It was said that, given a sheet of paper and an idle moment, Eisner could create a new book for Quality in the blink of an eye. Best of all, his ideas lasted a lot longer than that blink: a staple in both **Feature** and his own **Doll Man Quarterly**, the original Mighty Mite was on the stands until 1953, a healthy 14-year run, during which, from ground-level, he was to see many a full-sized hero come and go.

Another Eisner creation was **Uncle Sam**. Other publishers had heroes who stood for America, fought for America, dressed in costumes reminiscent of America. Quality had **Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam was** America! He looked like he'd stepped off the James Montgomery Flagg "I Want You" poster into the pages of **National Comics** #1, which, appropriately enough, was "Busy" Arnold's Fourth of July present to the comics-buying public of 1940. Otto Binder wrote his "non-origin" tale (after all, what can you say about a man who stepped full-grown out of the Stars and Stripes?), which told of a terrorist group called the Purple Shirts. **Uncle Sam** teamed up in that issue with Buddy (whose name sounds suspiciously like the partner of a certain other red-white-and-blue hero, who came along about a year after **Uncle Sam**), and the pair stayed together for 45 issues of **National** and eight of **Uncle Sam Quarterly**.



Perhaps their most notable saga was the one in **National** #18. The tale told of an attack on Pearl Harbor, and was dated December 1941. While at first glance nothing seems strange about that, remember that, as they are now, comics are post-dated a few months to keep them on the stands longer, so that issue was on sale in September, three months **before** the actual Pearl Harbor attack!

Besides prophesy, the **Uncle Sam** stories had superb art going for them (as did the Quality line in general). Among the artists to depict **Uncle Sam** (I know calling him "Uncle Sam" all the time sounds repetitive, but somehow, anything else like "Sam" or "Unk" seems so disrespectfull) and Buddy in their patriotic perils were Mort Leav, who was best known for his work on **The Heap**, the original swamp-monster; Reed Crandall, whose fine touch also graced the definitive **Blackhawk** sagas; and Quality's master craftsman, the artist whose style best summed up the Quality "look": Lou Fine.

While Fine's stint on **Uncle Sam** was brief, he is best remembered for the work he did on the adventures of two of the other **Freedom Fighters'** strips: **The Ray** and **The Black Condor**. Though he drew comics for only a few years, leaving the field by the mid-forties, Fine's beautiful detail work still serves as inspiration to comics artists, with his mastery of facial expression and graceful action. How perfect, then, to chronicle the deeds of **The Ray**, who swooped and darted like light itself!

The Ray started shining in **Smash Comics** #14 (September 1941), in a tale which told of cub reporter Lanford "Happy" Terrill, who joined a balloon expedition into the stratosphere. The balloon passed through a cosmic storm, during which Terrill volunteered to close an open valve on the hull of the ship. Struck by the fury of the storm, Terrill turned into a creature of light who called himself **The Ray**. As was the fashion, he took on a kid sidekick named Bud, whom he had saved from a shipwreck.

The Ray drew his power from light. He could be kept powerless by keeping him locked in darkness. When even a slim beam of light would break in, however, he was rejuvenated. He was certainly one of the most personable of the Quality heroes (or any of the Golden Age heroes, for that matter): as happy-go-lucky as his civilian name might lead one to believe when out of costume, he turned into a grim, blazing fury, dynamically clad all in yellow. His adventures stand up as a classic example of Fine art in comics, despite the fact that Lou Fine drew only about half of **The Ray's** tales, with others supplied by Reed Crandall and **Mad**'s Dave Berg.

Fine also set the pace in another Quality magazine, **Crack Comics** #1, with the **Black Condor**. In that issue, May 1940, the **Condor**

swooped down and took the identity of Senator Tom Wright, who had been murdered, and he lived as Wright throughout his career.

The **Condor** flew like his namesake, using glider-wings under his arms to aid him. Unlike other flying heroes, such as DC's **Hawkman**, the **Condor's** powers of flight were never given any explanation, adding to his total aura of mystery. Again, Fine illustrated only a few of his adventures. But the craftsmanship he exhibited was to inspire later artists to produce some of their best work.

THE DREADED BLACK CONDOR AND THE MILD SENATOR TOM WRIGHT ARE ONE AND THE SAME SINCE THE MURDER OF THE REAL SENATOR WRIGHT...THIS SWITCH IN FIANCES HAS BEEN KEPT FROM LOVELY WENDY FOSTER BECAUSE OF THE EFFECT... AND IT IS KNOWN ONLY TO HER FATHER, DR. FOSTER... THE BLACK CONDOR NOW CRUSHES THE SPONSORS OF AN AMAZING PLOT.

Another of Quality's anthology titles was **Police Comics**, which, for the most part, had nothing at all to do with the police. In the **Police** spotlight were **The Spirit** and our favorite human rubber-band, **Plastic Man**. But one of today's **Freedom Fighters** brought up the rear, as the only female star of **Police**. She was the **Phantom Lady**.

Phantom Lady, like the **Black Condor**, was Washington-based. Sandra Knight, as a senator's daughter, must have run into the man who was impersonating Senator Thomas Wright at many a cocktail party! As **Phantom Lady**, Sandy lacked the power to become a phantom which she has today. Instead, she had only her black-light projector, worn on her wrist, which produced a blackness out of which she "stepped like a phantom" to the rescue. Even though her powers were not mystical, her name suggested mystery, and she seemed to find herself constantly in the midst of whodunits. Her adventures were illustrated by some of the excellent Quality "house artists," most notable among them Frank Borth.

The last **Freedom Fighter** was also a citizen of **Police Comics**. In the first issue of that magazine, a scientific genius named Roy Lincoln discovered a dangerous destructive chemical. Nazis tried to steal the weapon, and he quickly swallowed it. (From Lincoln's eating the explosive and Happy Terrill's going outside the airship during a cosmic storm, we might wonder if, with all their bravery and heroism, plain old common sense might not be one of the Quality heroes' long suits.) Lincoln became a human bomb, possessing a touch which could demolish most anything. He put on a pair of asbestos gloves, and fashioned a suit out of the same material, with a helmet which served both to protect his secret identity and to keep him from accidentally detonating any low-flying birds. Lucky for him, I guess, that his power didn't affect asbestos, or he'd have been the first superhero to be arrested for indecent exposure!

As did most heroes of the forties,

The Human Bomb had a sidekick, a comic-relief character named Hustace Throckmorton, who shared **The Bomb's** powers, though not their outlet. His powers were in his feet! Throckmorton did not survive the war or escape to Earth-One, nor did **The Bomb's** later trio of assistants, **The Bombardiers**.

Quality bullpen-artist Paul Gustavson supplied the art for most of **The Human Bomb's** career, which lasted a respectable five years. Gustavson was one of the best-known of the artists of the period, though with all due respect, it is likely that he is more remembered for quantity than quality. His art was far from bad; but it was not the stand-out stuff that Crandall, Fine and others were turning out either. He worked for a huge number of publishers (creating the original **Angel**, perhaps the best-known of his characters, for Timely, now Marvel), and turned in competent work for all, work most recognizable by the fact that, unlike most of his contemporaries, he signed nearly all of his strips.

The characters we now know as **The Freedom Fighters** are but a handful of the hundreds of characters to pass through the pages of Quality's anthology titles. Unlike so many publishers whose books came and went almost weekly, Arnold established a number of titles and moved characters in and out of them, keeping sales up. Among the other heroes to appear in the pages of **Hit, Smash, Police, Military** and the rest of the Quality line were **Kid Eternity, Alias The Spider, Lady Luck, Quicksilver, Midnight, Space Legion, Madam Fatal, The Red Bee, Neon the Unknown** . . . the list goes on and on. Besides those already mentioned, Quality's artists included Jack Cole, Alex Kotsky, Chuck Cuidera, Dick Dillin (the latter pair best remembered for their fine work at DC as well as Quality, on **Blackhawk**, as well as Dillin's current work on **Justice League of America**), Nick Cardy, Tex Blaisdell, Al Andriola (artist on the "Kerry Drake" newspaper strip), Bob Powell, and Ruben

Moreira. Behind the typewriters were to be found such talents as Bill and Dorothy Woolfolk (Ms. Woolfolk was later to be an editor at DC), Dick and Dave Wood, Bill Finger, and famed SF writer Manly Wade Wellman.

As the trends in comics-buying in the late forties and early fifties shifted toward humor, Busy Arnold was there to follow the trend, as Quality came full-circle and returned to the comedy it had started with in 1937 in **Famous Funnies**. In the end, even comedy could not save the line from the "purge" of the fifties. About the time DC was to start the new age of superhero books in 1956 with the new **Flash's** first appearance in **Showcase**, Arnold sold what was left of the Quality books and the rights to most of the characters to DC. An age came to a dignified end.

When DC editor Julius Schwartz and his staff were looking for hero groups to team with the **Justice League** and the **Justice Society** in their annual teamup in 1974, they found what they were looking for in the old Quality line. Giving the heroes a reason to fight, Schwartz and his staff invented Earth-X, a world where the war had continued, and dubbed the heroes **The Freedom Fighters**. Later when Gerry Conway became a DC editor, he brought with him a horde of revival ideas, one of which was the adventures of those heroes whose adventure with the **JLA** and **JSA** had been so warmly received. When he revived them and brought them to Earth-One, he had their powers augmented by the dimension-warp. **The Ray** gained control of other forms of energy besides light; **Phantom Lady** became capable to turn intangible, like a true phantom; **Black Condor** gained some mysterious telepathic power, the use of which makes him temporarily insane; and **Doll Man** has gained some form of telekinesis. As for **Uncle Sam** and **The Bomb**, only time will tell whether the dimension-hopping has affected their powers.

What lies in the future of **The Freedom Fighters?** Only writer Bob Rozakis and editor Jack C. Harris know where the **FFers'** flight from unjust blame will lead them. But one thing is clear: the **FFers** will continue to live up to their heritage, proving again that quality is not just an adjective, but their middle name.

IN THE BEGINNING...

GOLD

As everyone knows, each new venture, each daringly different project, takes that brave first step into the waiting unknown. For some experiments, that first step is more of a faltering stumble or an out-and-out pratfall. Those are the ideas that quietly fade into obscurity, never to be heard from again.

No one could ever say that about the comic book, though. Not even those who would have liked nothing more than to expose **Superman** to a lethal dose of Kryptonite and gleefully watch as his myriad offshoots fell by the wayside. No. For better or worse, the Golden Age of Comics affected people.

"A new age of magic" said some writers and experts. "The marijuana of the nursery" claimed other critics. And so the battle raged. Many took part in the conflict—teachers, librarians, psychiatrists—but few realized the enormous impact the fledgling comic-book business would have.

It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The two "ages" of comics which preceeded what we know as the "Golden Age" pale by comparison. From 1900 through 1920, comic books were . . . well, COMICAL. But many comic books turned away from humor after the Twenties and plunged headlong into tales of high (and not-so-high) adventure. And then something wondrous happened. Shaped by the uniqueness of the times and birthed by men of great vision, the comic book was altered for all time. Out of the lingering years of the Great Depression and ever-growing world tension sprang the legendary Man of Steel . . . **SUPERMAN.** Cue the trumpets. The revolution had begun, the super-hero had arrived.

It would be hard to find anyone seriously involved with the comic book, be he (or she) fanatic fan or polished professional, who wouldn't love to peel back the calendar and experience those decisive days. Not for the finished product itself; those early 64-pagers did not, as a rule, lend themselves to high-quality story-telling or well-defined artwork. But

OR: WHERE WERE YOU IN '42?

by Thomas Tuna

for the sense of adventure, the feeling of originality that was there. It was a special time to be working in comics.

It was also a special time for regrets, for one Harry I. Wildenberg. Never heard of the guy? Well, Harry I. was the self-proclaimed creator of the basic format of the comic book and, ironically, was one of the comics' chief detractors. It seems that Harry first printed comic tabloids for advertising purposes for the Gulf Oil Company back in 1932, tabloids which eventually became 32-page color comic magazines distributed by Proctor and Gamble and entitled "Comics on Parade." According to Wildenberg, these advertising 'comics' were the inspiration (along with newspaper comic strips) for the successful comic book publishers. And Harry never forgave himself for his 'part' in the comics boom.

Wildenberg's fondest wish was a unique one: to make confetti out of all existing comics and to scatter them to the four winds. "I don't feel proud that I started the comic books," the ex-sales manager once said. "I'm glad parents and educators are waking up to the menace of the comic books. I'd be glad to do whatever I could to help." Without a doubt, Harry had a heart to match his ego.

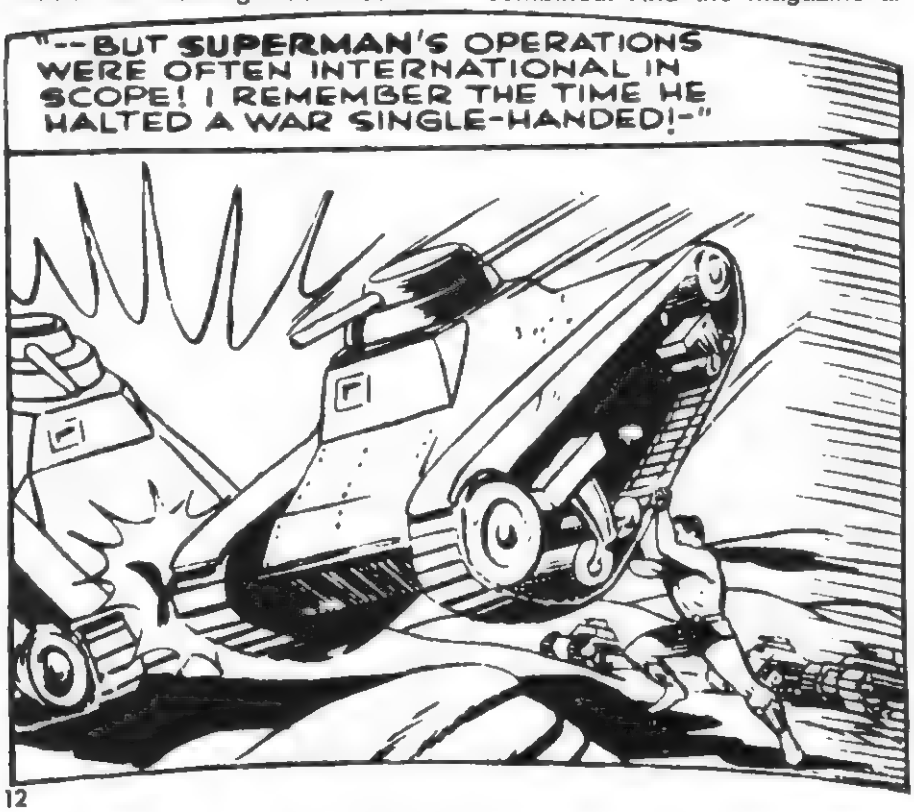
But, despite any 'help' Mr. Wildenberg may have offered, comic books survived. More, they **thrived.** The "Golden Age" was upon the people of the late 1930's . . . and the harbinger was the gentleman from Krypton.

No discussion of the Golden Age of Comics can begin without delving into two historical landmarks: the year 1938 and the bombshell known as **Superman.** Fate had destined the two for each other. The American people of 1938 were desperately in need of a Super-Man; the average citizen was still trying to scramble from under the debris of our nation's worst financial collapse, and was becoming increasingly aware of the horrors of a madman called Hitler in Austria.

But help was on the way. One

year earlier, in 1937, National Periodicals published **DETECTIVE COMICS,** breaking away from the original comic book format of reprinting newspaper comic strips in book form. Now they were ready to debut the ultimate hero, a special character brought to life by teenagers Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (and promoted by M.C. Gaines and Sheldon Mayer) in the first issue of **ACTION COMICS.** For all you footnote fans out there, the very first **Superman** comic book script was actually prepared as a strip for the newspapers and, as such, began in the middle of the action! But nothing was about to stop the Man of Steel; the character's popularity was such that, in 1939, not only were his comic book adventures fast selling out, but the **Superman Wrist Watch** swept the country as the year's hottest novelty item!

As the Golden Age progressed out of the echoes of the Crash and into the 1940's and the grisly reality of this planet's second great war, **Superman** remained the focal point of the comic books. The man who could "leap tall buildings with a single bound" received almost as much ink alone as the rest of his colorfully costumed followers did combined. And the magazine articles ranged across as many topics as Supes had powers.



E.J. Kahn Jr. took on the Man of Tomorrow in a 1940 article entitled "Why I Don't Believe in Superman." Kahn took an immediate liking to **Superman** when a Nazi newspaper attacked the Action Ace as "offensively pacifistic" and when E.J. himself noted that "when Superman doesn't like a war, he simply stops it." But, as the author pointed out, didn't all that changing back and forth from the dynamic **Superman** to the decidedly dull Clark Kent wear him out? Picky, picky, picky.

Superman was taken seriously by people, too. People like Walter J. Ong, one of the truly rare minds of the Golden Age. You see, according to Mr. Ong, Supes was a NAZI! Ong wanted people to believe that the earth's greatest defender was solely interested in being the hero, the duce, der Fuhrer. Specifically, **Superman** was a hero "with definite interest in the ideologies of herdist politics." Instant translation: **Superman** wanted everyone to know he was the boss, and Ong resented it!

Other incredible things were said about the Man of Steel. Would you believe that the son of Jor-El was once thought to be a leak on the atom bomb-producing Manhattan Project? The whole security magilla began in a story where **Superman** aided a young physicist named Gilmore, and came dangerously close to the cyclotron of Prof. Duste, one of Supe's less-than-immortal foes. The United States

War Department was alarmed by this story, and the accuracy it contained about the then top-secret atom bomb. They moved in to prevent the Man of Steel from learning more about nuclear physics. Not to worry, though. **Superman** was cleared in a "secret letter" from the War Department to the District Engineer at the United States Engineer Office in Tennessee. It seems that the War Department believed that "funny page" exposure of the cyclotron would only serve to **de-emphasize** serious consideration by the general public. In other words, no one would believe it, because it was printed in a comic book!

As previously mentioned, the Man of Tomorrow was a special case; he set the stage for all the remaining super-doers who helped make the Golden Age the happening it was. And not everyone who lived through that "happening" reveled in its magic.

Librarians of the early 1940's seemed to enjoy taking potshots at the comic books every opportunity they got. Perhaps they felt threatened, maybe they honestly believed they were protecting childrens' morals by condemning comics. Whatever their inner motives, the formal objections of librarians were many and varied. They didn't like the fact that comics were so "sensational" in their plots and action. They objected to the sub-standard artwork and paper used in the comics. They resented the stories which highlighted crime and "sloppy sentiment." And they weren't crazy about the casual grammar found in the early books. HOLY MOLEY!

Individual librarians took pen in hand to combat comics as well. One of them, Ms. Helen Smith, not only spoke out against comics, but brought libraries themselves to task as a chief cause of "comic mania." Writing for the WILSON LIBRARY BULLETIN, Ms. Smith explained how apprehensive she felt when her two young children brought home a comic book one day. (There was no reason for shock or chagrin; comics were practically a medium of exchange

SUPERMAN
by
JERRY SIEGEL AND JOE SHUSTER
WARNING: DON'T READ THIS STORY WITHOUT FIRST SETTING YOUR SHOCK ABSORBERS FOR SOME OF THE HARDEST JOLTS OF SURPRISE YOU'VE EVER RUN ACROSS! FOR SUPERMAN, THUS FAR SUCCESSFUL IN EVERY BATTLE, AT LAST IS BROUGHT FACE TO FACE WITH DEFEAT--AND THERE FINDS THE GREATEST VICTORY OF ALL! A CONTRADICTION? YOU MAY NOT THINK SO WHEN YOU HAVE COME TO THE END OF THIS AMAZING TALE ABOUT--"AMERICA'S SECRET WEAPON!"

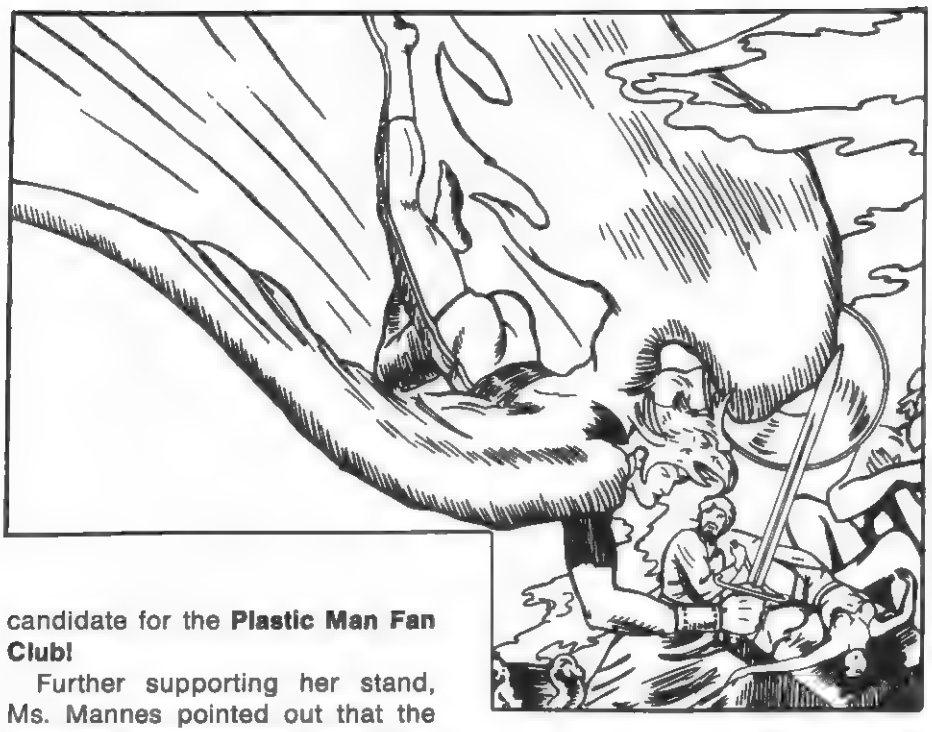
for children in the 1940's). Having never even read the Sunday 'funnies' to her children, Ms. Smith was somewhat at a loss to understand their interest in those "lurid little nightmare makers." She eventually reasoned that the lack of good children's libraries was to blame for youngsters turning to the 'inferior' comics.

Interest in the comic books ran so high in the years during the war, that it took just two months before a rebuttal to Ms. Smith's article appeared in the pages of the same magazine. Ella Jean Wilson (you guessed it; another librarian) placed the "blame" at Helen Smith's doorstep. As Ella Jean saw the situation, it was the fault of the **parents** that comics were allowed to flourish. Strangely enough, neither librarian even considered the comic book as a possible tool of learning. They just wanted to use **Superman, Batman,** and friends as 'planks' for their soap-boxes.

It wasn't until World War II drew to its bloody finale, though, that the enemies of comic books took deadly aim and let loose with both barrels. In a magazine piece with the unusual title, "Junior Has a Craving," writer Marya Mannes seemed to sum up the feelings of comic book opponents across the country. She feared for "all children between ages six and eleven who read them regularly and who cannot, ostensibly, live without them."

Unfortunately, the wonder and magic of those early comic books were lost on Ms. Mannes and her supporters. To their uninitiated eyes, the comics were merely 'read' by those people who couldn't really read, providing them with an abundance of the "timeless subject of human interest"—crime and criminals, heroes and heroic deeds.

"There is no effort in reading comics," Ms. Mannes would say. "The books demand no concentration. Because every act is pictured, they demand no imagination." And in case you thought the good lady was mincing words, she also stated that " comic books in their present form are the absence of thought" and are "the greatest intellectual narcotic on the market." Marya was definitely not a



candidate for the **Plastic Man Fan Club!**

Further supporting her stand, Ms. Mannes pointed out that the American lower class read 29% more comics than the middle and upper classes and that unskilled laborers (like writers and artists, I suppose) were the biggest fans of the "intellectual narcotic." Of course, she included that women were far less addicted to comics than men. Whatever that means.

Ms. Mannes' major complaint about comics was typical: they were a stumbling block to education. Despite a bookshelf crammed full of 'good reading matter', her eight-year-old son would still rather "settle down on the floor with a comic book than do anything else." A sad state of affairs reasoned the author, since "every hour spent with comics is an hour in which all inner growth is stopped." A scary thought, that.

What about such standouts as **Superman** and **Captain Marvel?** Ms. Mannes admitted that those two (along with a few others) were printed clearly and colored tastefully, but that the balance of the titles were "vulgar, obscene, and wretchedly produced."

She went on to denounce jungle comics (with their "poor dialogue" and "half-naked girls bound to racks"), crime and horror titles ("lurid and hideous"), and even animal comics. Her favorite animal targets were characters like **Super Rabbit** and **Hoppy the Marvel Bunny** as they confronted the "evil denizens of the animal world." Doesn't she know that rabbits (and bunnies) have feelings, too? Hoppy has yet to recover from the shock of being rejected.

The bottom line, in the opinion of the author, was that the American people were looking up from the bottom of a deep well. Mannes believed that our way of life was so mentally and spiritually poor that we turned to comics to fill the void. We didn't know any better. People wanted comics, thought Ms. Mannes, the same way the Germans wanted Hitler in the 1930's. I wonder if Ms. Mannes ever got around to comparing notes with the opinionated Walter J. Ong? Even **Superman** wouldn't have survived THAT team-up!

Needless to say, some of the points Ms. Mannes brought up about the early comics were well-considered and were taken into consideration by the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers in 1948 during the adoption of the Comics Code. But I'm getting ahead of myself. There were many writers who took exception to the repeated attacks on comic books and who actually hailed the comic as a true literary accomplishment—or at least as a pleasant diversion from a battle-scarred world.

Another magazine article, this one called "They Like It Rough—In Defense of Comics", published in 1940 set the tone for the pro-comic set. And those comics being defended were already selling to the tune of 7,500,000 each month, with the bi-monthly **SUPERMAN** title alone being eagerly gobbled up by three million readers. Since the "prestige of comics is tremendous" and "comics have taken to the hearts of children all over the United States", why worry?

In the words of co-authors Williams and Wilson (and they said it well), "It is time to cease being Victorian about comics." Children

SAMPLES FROM THE

PICTURE THREE

a. In this picture why are the buildings small, or at the top than at the base?

b. What two action words are used in the caption?

and

c. To whom does the word him refer?

d. What word describes Superman?

PICTURE FOUR

a. What is Superman clinging to?

b. Who does the action describe in the action?

c. Explain the meaning of propelled.

d. Explain the use of the apostrophe in Steel's.

A GREAT VAULT CARRIES SUPERMAN INTO THE ROADSTER BESIDE NANCY
WHAT'S THE IDEA?
WHETHER YOU'RE AWARE OF IT OR NOT, I'VE JUST SAVED YOU FROM A DISAGREEABLE EXPERIENCE. THOSE GAMBLERS WERE GOING TO STEAL YOUR WINNINGS FROM YOU

PICTURE FIVE

a. What detail in the picture shows you that Superman has just that moment landed?

b. Explain the meaning of the word vault

c. What question do these phrases answer into the roadster beside Nancy?

WHEN THEY REACH THE THORP-ENSON MANSION, SUPERMAN EMERGES INTO VIEW
YOU!
COOLEST AND NOW WILL YOU BE SO KIND AS TO ENTER YOUR HOME?

PICTURE SIX

a. Name the two action men men in the caption

and

b. Who does he not ar

c. Who does the sentence mean?

d. Explain the meaning of avenges

were interested in the "rumbling realities" besetting the country in the early 1940's and wanted to "take part in these 'realities' by proxy, with Superman and Captain America."

A survey taken of comic-age children seemed to support that theory. Why did youngsters of that insecure era buy and read the comics? The answers were only too-eagerly given. The children enjoyed the aura of patriotism that pervaded the comics, the easy-to-admire heroes, and the "tough talk" sprinkled throughout the fast-paced stories. **The Batman** and **Superman** were favorites of those surveyed since they were super-heroes "evil ones are afraid of."

The following year, 1941, brought more rumblings of war from Europe and further ripples from the growing wave of comic-dom. Even those appraising comics from a strictly practical point of view were impressed. Business was booming. The "new straw in the wind" had blossomed into a million-dollar-a-month sensation. With super-heroes populating a full half of the current crop of titles, publications like **HIT COMICS, WEIRD COMICS,** and **SUPER COMICS** were quickly putting a strain on the manufacturers of marbles and lead soldiers.

Even the newspaper 'funny pages' were feeling the hot breath of the long-underwear characters;

the books were passing the comic strips in popularity as well as convenience. It was certainly easier to save and trade an issue of **BATMAN** than a copy of the DAILY NEWS.

Other reasons were put forth for the continued reading of the comic books. Some believed that since the nearness of war made children turn to comics and 'ray guns', that parents should "not be too eager to take them away." With comics, children can "train in security for the world of radio-roto-terror."

That terror truly materialized in 1942. American soldiers went overseas to battle for the fate of the world ... and comic books went with them. Every month, 35,000 comics made **Superman** as much a part of the war for European-based American G.I.'s as foxholes and C-rations.

Harvey Zorbaugh, writing for SCIENCE DIGEST in 1942, supported the soft-bound worlds of fantasy. He praised the comics of the war years for their emergence "as an American institution and a major medium of communication and influence." Gallup polls were quick to jump on the comics bandwagon. Their research revealed that comic books were America's favorite form of literature, with an audience of more than 70 million adventure-lovers!

Young people were most affected by the 'escape from reality' found in the comics. They loved the heroes, experienced their comic-book lives, and borrowed their powers. **Captain Marvel,** one of the world's most powerful and most popular mortals, received over 30,000 letters each year from the United States and abroad, and the fan club dedicated to the Big Red Cheese swelled to 573,119 members. **Superman Workbooks** had miraculous powers, helping students to read in more than 2,500 classrooms. Other comic book idols did their fair share as well, helping to sell war bonds, promoting salvage drives, and

SUPERMAN WORKBOOKS

WORKING AT SUPER-SPEED, SUPERMAN RAPIDLY CLEANS UP THE HAVOC LEFT BY THE FLOOD....
IT WOULD TAKE THEM MANY DAYS TO CLEAR UP THIS MESS!

PICTURE FOUR

a. Find a word that describes an action.

_____ Describes _____

b. To whom does the word **them** refer?

Them refers to _____

c. Tell what Superman holds above his head.

_____

d. Explain the meaning of **havoc.**

_____

_____

organizing victory garden clubs. America was in good hands.

Those people who believed they had 'outgrown' comics and only read them "to see how bad they are" came away talking to themselves. They admitted that the books weren't a 'bad place' to learn about reading and prepare for life. After all, the world of tomorrow should be left to the men of tomorrow . . . the children.

By 1943, Nelson Rockefeller decided to tap the enormous potential of the comic book. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs shelled out $50,000 to Parents' Institute, Inc. for the publication of Spanish and Portuguese comics. The result? "Heroes Verdaderos", a comic of American war exploits, and "Nuestro Futuro", an anti-Nazi comic pamphlet, were smash hits.

In 1944, William Moulton Marston, who gave the world the Amazon Princess called **Wonder Woman,** wrote that comics had reached a "zenith of popularity never before achieved in world history by any form of reading matter." And he should know; his super-heroine was taking a back seat to no one. The results of a poll showed that **Wonder Woman** was more popular than seven rival male super-heroes by the count of 40-1!

But what of the boys and girls, from first-graders through college students, who plunked down their silvery savings for a slice of fantasy? Despite the warnings of their parents, what did young visionaries think of comics during the "Formative Age?"

In 1943, the Main Library of Toledo, Ohio, set out to find some answers. Librarians and children profited alike. In an unprecedented move, the library placed comics in the children's section (after carefully screening out 35 out of 60 comics as being 'unacceptable') and watched with great anticipation.

The days that followed proved to be quite interesting. The kids read the comics, and the librarians read the kids. The children were pleasantly surprised when they discovered the comics next to their regular books, and quickly

accepted them as part and parcel of the library collection. The youngsters were so satisfied with the comics that, upon questioning, they could explain no difference between the comic books and the standard library fare. The junior readers were only too happy to peruse the comics in the library and then leave for home, borrowed hard-bound books tucked securely under one arm.

The conclusions of the library staff were not unexpected, though. They judged that children are, indeed, enthralled with comics (so enthralled that twelve comics disappeared from their rack within six weeks), but that "comics will have little permanent effect upon the child who has learned to appreciate the worthwhile in his reading."

That was 1943. Stay with me now as I shift ahead to the waning years of the Golden Age . . . to 1950. And to a classroom discussion among 11-year-olds about comics. Robert Conway, the pioneering teacher in question, wanted to know how his students felt about the more established four-color wonderland. Let's give a listen.

To begin with, Mr. Conway asked for general reactions to comics. The students didn't disappoint him. They felt that the crime comics harmed no one who was in the proper frame of mind (as opposed to severe criticisms leveled against the crime titles by some 'experts'), and that the comics actually served to warn the average citizen that crime didn't pay. In addition to that, the more discerning comics fans also believed that the "amazing-type comics" may give people hope that true heroes may actually exist in their troubled world.

But Conway wouldn't let the discussion end there. Why spend all that money on the comics? he wanted to know. "They are interesting and short. You can read them easily. It's easy to follow the story", were a few of the responses. But the overwhelming answer went right to the heart of the comics' strength: "the pictures." Comics is a visual medium and the comics' early fans were not slow to pick this up. To actually see a **Superman,**

Batman, or **Captain Marvel** was an exercise in unbound joy.

And while the artwork attracted many a curious eye, the stories were appreciated as well. "You get to know the people in comics," some said. "You get to feel familiar with the comics," claimed others.

And so the enchantment of the Golden Age went, not with a whimper, but a bang. With no real resolution to the differences between the 'experts' in sight even in the 1970's. But what are they writing about comics nowadays? Has THAT changed?

Articles proclaim the "kaboom in old comic books" and still discuss those Golden Age 'goodies' and the worth of comics dated prior to 1940. Leaving the past behind, one contemporary article published in NEWSWEEK sang the praises of **Mighty Man,** a creation published in South Africa by Afri-Comics. The black hero, inspired by the exploits of **Superman,** carries a strong law and order theme to South African blacks. **Mighty Man** may be on the brink of becoming another comic-book legend in his own time. The character has already become a "cult hero in the black townships", and has achieved a circulation of 47,000 in Africa.

There have even been magazine articles delving into the complexities of being a comic-book writer (an occupation some people would have had trouble accepting as respectable back in the Golden Age).

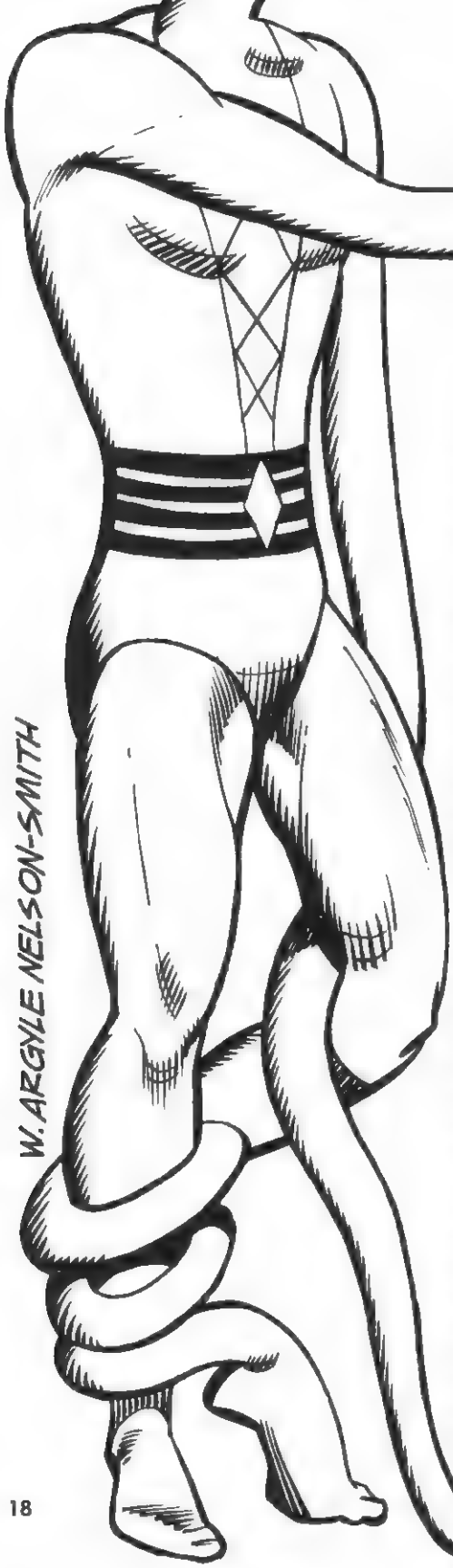
One current article sticks out, though, as perhaps the most significant piece on the comics field. "Comeback of the Comic Books", written by Dan Carlinsky, mentioned several integral innovations of the comics, while touching upon the contributions of a certain 17-year-old editor/publisher of THE COMIC READER by the name of Paul Levitz. The author seemed to think that name was important.

Carlinsky also brought to light that in present-day comics "the artwork is better, the dialogue's for real, the superheroes have changed." For the first time in the 40-year history of comics, thousands of readers are high school and college students.

Dan has his points. The times have changed, comics have undergone a face lift, and many people have formed new opinions on the comic book in general. I have just one bone to pick with you, Dan: the **title** of your article. What do you mean "Comeback of the Comic Books?"

They never left.

THAT ROUGH 'N' READY, RED-CLAD RUBBER BAND MAN...



W. ARGYLE NELSON-SMITH

Ask anyone who read comics during the golden age (the 1940s, folks) which title was the wildest, zaniest, wackiest comic book on the stands, and the winner, hands-down, will be **PLASTIC MAN**.

Created for Everett M. Arnold's Quality Comics line by the very talented writer/artist Jack Cole, **PLASTIC MAN** was a unique strip from the very beginning. For one thing, he could mold or stretch his body into any shape desired, an ability that made him an unbeatable crimefighter. He could (and often did) mold himself into a dog, a car, a table, or any number of other things, and use his disguise to foil the unsuspecting crooks, who were convinced they had successfully eluded their red-clad pursuer. And all those super-stretching characters who've come along since then . . . **Elastic Lad,** the **Elongated Man, Mr. Fantastic,** etc., . . . all owe their beginnings to Jack Cole's human rubberband.

For another (unique) thing, **PLASTIC MAN** started his comic book life as a crook known as The Eel (a.k.a. Eel O'Brian), but soon became a champion of justice in the finest tradition. **Plastic Man's** origin has been retold in fan-publications so many times that I'll skip any recapping of how The Eel was shot during a robbery of the Crawford Chemical Works and left behind by his heartless pals; of how the wounded Eel O'Brian was doused with a strange acid while fleeing; of how he found his way to a secluded mountainside monastery where he discovered that the acid-bath had somehow endowed him with amazing elastic powers that later enable him to capture his ex-pals and turn them over to the law; of how, after having had his outlook on life changed by a kindly monk, the new **Plastic Man** decided it was much more interesting (as well as fun!) working FOR the law, instead of against it. Thus was born the career and legend of **PLASTIC MAN** . . . but you already KNOW all that, so there's no point in my recapping it for you here, right?

The point is: the character started out as a crook and became a hero.

Plastic Man also started out as a second-rate strip and became a Super Star.

When the editors at Quality Comics were assembling the contents for **POLICE COMICS** #1 (August, 1941), they came up with nine new characters, all of whom would debut in this new title. These nine included such heroes as **The Human Bomb, The Mouthpiece, Phantom Lady, Eagle Evans,** and others, including, of course, **Plastic Man**. It was the policy in those days (and still is, today) that you put your strongest character on the book's front cover: give your big star the spotlight, so he'll pull those readers in! With, for example, **DETECTIVE COMICS,**

BY LARRY HERNDON

you can always count on **Batman** being the cover attraction, no matter what other characters the book might contain as back-up features. The same principle applies to **ACTION COMICS** and countless other titles that've been published over the years. Your main hero was always front and center in the cover spotlight, and more or less carried the book on his popularity.

So when **POLICE COMICS** #1 was being assembled, the editorial powers that be at Quality picked as their main cover attraction the one 'n' only . . . **Firebrand**!

Quick! How many of you have EVER heard of **Firebrand**??

Very few of you, I'll bet! And THAT shows you just how little "charisma" he had and how long he lasted. (For the record, good ol' **Firebrand** was around for a mere 13 issues.) Poor ol' **Plas** (as he was affectionately known to fans) was stuck back in the middle of the book with all the other supporting strips, just biding his time.

And sure enough, it wasn't long before reader response alerted the editors that all those copies of **POLICE COMICS** were selling because of the stretching shenanigans of their red-garbed rubberband man, and by the time issue #5 rolled around, ol' PLAS was the headline attraction on the covers, a position he was to hold for 97 straight issues! **Plastic Man** was also soon awarded his own book (in 1943), the first issue being a special one, titled "The Game of Death." In all, **Plastic Man** would make 102 appearances in **POLICE COMICS**, and his own magazine would run 64 issues, folding in 1956. Shortly after that, the Quality lineup was purchased by DC Comics . . . which is why we're discussing **Plastic Man** in these pages!

As I said, **Plastic Man** was a very unique hero, and in addition to the other points already covered that contributed to this uniqueness, there was an atmosphere about his stories that was, well, **different**. Other writers, toiling on this subject in fanzines, have insisted that the **Plastic Man** tales were strictly parody and comedy, with the stories being mere excuses for the strip's creator to exercise his sense of humor. Well, there was comedy present, to be sure, and a fair amount of parody too, but there was also drama, pathos, and grand adventure, with all these ingredients wrapped up in tightly-plotted stories that never failed to amuse and entertain. It is very difficult to blend humor and drama successfully in the same story, but Jack Cole did it. And HOW this was carried off is what set the strip apart from all the others on the stands.

Cole achieved it by depicting **Plastic Man** as the ONLY sane person in an insane world, and that is exactly why this was the wackiest comic to ever roll off the four-color presses! PLAS's mind was cool, logical, intelligent, . . . but everyone else in his world, including the villains he fought and even his partner, WOOZY WINKS, were all slightly bananas!

Did I say "slightly"?? Make that TOTALLY! The strip was like the Marx Brothers, Abbott & Costello, and The Three Stooges all rolled into one. Even the characters **Plastic Man** would pass on the street . . . the so-called "background people" found in every strip, were the oddest assortment of human beings (if that term applies!) you ever saw! These caricatures of the human form sprang from the fertile mind of the strip's writer/artist, Jack Cole, and were an important ingrediant contributing to the feeling that **Plastic Man's** entire world was crazy.

Born in New Castle, Pennsylvania on December 14, 1914, Jack Ralph Cole was one of five children of Delace and Cora Cole. He took to art and humor at an early age, reading the popular comic strips in the newspapers and drawing many of his own. As a teenager he took a mail order cartooning course, and by 1935 he'd made his first sale: a cartoon to **BOY'S LIFE MAGAZINE.** Shortly thereafter, the young Cole (along with his new wife, Dorothy) were off to New York City, where he soon found himself working at the Harry A. Chesler Studio as an art assistant. One job led to another and then another, and by 1940 Jack Cole had moved over to Everett Arnold's brand new Quality Comics group, where he did such serious strips as **MIDNIGHT** and **QUICKSILVER**, along with various humorous one-pagers like **SLAP HAPPY PAPPY**.

And then came **Plastic Man** . . . and the world was never the same again!

Cole drew the strip with an obvious, loving affection, something that had not been as evident in his previous comic book work. His zany sense of humor personified itself in the strip, with riotous insanity running rampant through every panel. **Plastic Man** exploded on the scene with a force that would not be denied, and not only did he soon get the cover spot on **POLICE COMICS**, he was also moved to the front of the book, so he could lead off every issue!

The strip was frantic slapstick, low humor and large doses of action, all dished up in Jack Cole's electrifying style, and the readers ate it up. Cole even poked fun at himself in one adventure wherein Plas battled the ancient god of mischief, Eloc. Spelled backwards, "Eloc" becomes "Cole" . . . Somehow it seems very appropriate that Cole considered himself a master mischief-maker!

But the ultimate in humor and self-parody occured in **POLICE COMICS** #20, when Cole drew himself into the strip! Jack portrayed himself as a skinny figure with wide eyes, a very sharp nose, and a voice that stuttered like Porky Pig! At one point in the story, Jack and **Woozy Winks** have been captured by the villains and when they question Cole, he talks **so much** that they are finally forced to tie him up and stuff a gag in his mouth to shut him up! One page later, Cole is rescued by his publisher ("M-m-might-a known it . . . t-that guy c-could f-find me ANYWHERE!") who drags him back to his drawing board! All things considered, it's probably the wildest **PLASTIC MAN** adventure Cole ever did!

I suppose PLAS' partner, **Woozy Winks**, deserves a few words at this point. However, since Woozy is my favorite comic sidekick of all time, I simply CAN'T confine myself to just a FEW words! Indeed, I could easily do an entire article on the reknown, rotund Mr. Winks . . .

Like his elastic friend, **Woozy** started his comic book life as a crook. He made his first appearance in **POLICE COMICS** #13, when he rescued a drowning mystic who'd fallen into the drink. In gratitude, the man bestowed the power of nature's protection on his fat rescuer and thereafter nature (in the form of a tornado, windstorm, earthquake, or whatever) would protect him. **Woozy** mulled over what to do with his new power and finally decided to toss a coin to determine a course between good or evil. Fate decreed that evil won and Mr. Winks was soon off on a crime spree—only to be promptly dumped in jail by **Plas**. Yet with his unusual power, no jail could hold him for long, so **Plastic Man** struck a bargain with him: if he'd go straight, they'd join together as partners to wage war on criminals. **Woozy** agreed and thus the lovable butterball (who looked a great deal like Alfred Hitchcock!) became the trusted sidekick and friend of the red-clad rubberman. Even after **Woozy's** power later faded and was forgotten, they still made a great team.

Woozy had a knack for finding trouble and often got himself (and, ultimately, his partner) involved in every kind of wild adventure imaginable! Mr. Winks considered himself a lady-killer supreme, and every time he'd spot a good-looking, sexy young thing (and Cole was GOOD at drawing good-looking, sexy young things!), he'd

go into a drooling fit and start making a play for a date. As it usually turned out, the girl already HAD a boyfriend (7 feet, 9 inches tall, built like a gorilla . . . you know the type!) who also, incidentally, just happened to be the crook Plas was after. Or sometimes, just for the sake of varying the theme, the girl herself would be revealed to be the main villain . . . in which case she'd flirt with poor ol' **Woozy** in order to lead both he and **Plas** to their doom.

Our heroes always triumphed, of course, and the redoubtable Woozy would promptly swear off women for the rest of his life . . . or until he spotted the NEXT good-looking, sexy young thing . . . which was usually next issue! But, despite the theme being used again and again, Cole kept it fresh and interesting,

and even did stories in which **Woozy** would rescue **Plas**, proving that the bumbling sidekick was good for more than merely getting them into trouble. Woozy even got his own strip, which ran in **PLASTIC MAN COMICS** for many issues, and the character remains, for me, the epitome of the term "comic sidekick."

Earlier in this article I mentioned the unique elements that made Plastic Man so different from the other union-suited heroes on the newsstands, and I would be negligent if I failed to discuss **how Plas** battled crime, because it was, perhaps, his most unique feature. Most comic book heroes just wade into the badguys, fists swinging and every man for himself . . . but not so with **Plas**. Oh, occasionally he'd try a slug-fest with the baddies, but usually the synthetic sleuth would merely shape himself into some object (a roast turkey, a table, a chair, a jack-in-the-box, a carpet, a house, et al) and spring on the unsuspecting villains with a suddenness that left them befuddled and (co-incidentally) wrapped up in the hero's rubbery arms. The net result was that the crooks often trapped themselves. **Plas** was a pretty tough customer; bullets merely bounced off his elastic body, leaving him unharmed. And if he got tossed off a building, he'd just bounce right back! About the only problem PLAS had were those caused by extremes of heat or cold; a frigid blast would turn him brittle as an icecube, or a blazing inferno would reduce his rubbery body to a gooey, soggy mess. Quit wits (and an occasional assist from Woozy) would soon rescue **Plas** from his predicament, however, and he'd be bouncing along again after the

villains like the proverbial "bouncing rubber ball." (Rolling himself into a ball was one of his favorite tricks.)

Cole's style on the strip was fresh and constantly inventive, employing such innovative layout tricks as tilted panels with unusual perspectives and angles that would do a Hollywood cameraman proud. In the words of noted fan historian Howard Keltner, "Jack Cole and **Plastic Man** were made for each other!" Even after twelve years of doing the strip, Cole's work was still fresh, inventive, and even downright inspired.

But all good things must, alas, come to an end. And what was ending in the early 1950s was the first great super-hero boom, a phenomenon that had seen literally hundreds of costumed crime-busters crowding the stands. Now, they were dropping like flies, being replaced with true crime and horror comics, and those super-heroes who managed to survive did so, for the most part, by changing into quasi-horror titles. **PLASTIC MAN** was no exception. Soon he was battling ghostly night-riders, invisible invaders in flying saucers, gigantic ants, vampire bats, and who knows what else, doing his best to capture the attention of the new readers who wanted terror on every page. A perfect example of this blatant appeal to the horror fans is the cover of **PLASTIC MAN** #37 (Sept., 1952) which shows **Plas** and **Woozy** struggling against an invasion of king-size ants. The cover blurb is done in appropriately spooky-styled lettering and screams "The Eerie Horror of the Gigantic Ants!"

With the appeal for horror fans, we had a different **Plastic Man**. Gone was the sly, sophisticated humor and innocent insanity of earlier tales—and gone too, was Jack Cole. Other artists and writers had taken over the book, turning **Plas** and **Woozy** into mere shadows of their former selves. Cole continued doing the **PLASTIC MAN** strip in **POLICE COMICS** up until the end (#102), but he'd lost control of his character's own book due to changing readers' tastes. Soon thereafter he quit comics entirely and moved to Illinois, where he continued doing cartoons for **PLAYBOY MAGAZINE**, something he'd been doing since its early issues. (See? I **told** you Cole was good at drawing good-looking, sexy young things!!) And, in Illinois, Jack was able to work towards

something that had been a life long goal: selling a syndicated comic strip.

The year 1958 saw his dream realized when a newspaper syndicate in Chicago accepted his newly-created **BETSY AND ME** strip and Cole was off and running again. Then, unexpectedly, the sensitive genius who was Jack Cole took his own life in August of that same year . . . with no apparent reason for the act. Thus the curtain came down on the creator of one of comicdom's most memorable characters.

But, unlike real life, fictional characters can be born again. In 1966, DC's **HOUSE OF MYSTERY** was running the **DIAL H FOR HERO** strip, featuring the adventures of young Robby Reed, who had a telephone-dial device that would, when he dialed the letters H-E-R-O, turn him into a superhero. (To change back to Robby Reed, he simply dialed O-R-E-H, . . . in case you're wondering . . .) During the course of Robby's adventures, he was turned into dozens of heroes, all of them a bit gimmicky and ranging in quality from inspired to just so-so.

But in issue #160 (July, 1966), Robby dialed the magic letters and, ZAP, was turned into **Plastic Man**! He had the same costume, the same powers, the works. Drawn by Jim Mooney, Plas stretched and bounced his way through the story . . . and right into his own book, the first issue of which was dated Nov.-Dec., 1966!

It lasted only ten issues. And it tried. It really did, folks, but the humor just didn't quite come off and left us with a diluted effort that had two strikes against it before it even began. I think the timing was wrong for a funny super-hero; the mid-60s was a time of turmoil and unrest in the country, and comic readers simply weren't looking for humor. The **PLASTIC MAN** of this revived version was revealed to actually be the SON of the original red-clas hero, and the entire concept just didn't cut it.

But you can't keep a good man down, especially one that can bounce right back at you like a rubber ball! The fourth version of **Plastic Man** was reborn in the 1970's, conceptually sound, and blessed with good scripts from Steve Skeates and John Albano, and matching artwork by Ramona Fradon. This **Plastic Man** recaptured much of the fun and flavor of the original, and even brought back ol' **Woozy**. Now it too is gone, but with a character like **Plastic Man**, as versatile as he is pliable, he's bound to pop up (in one shape or another) again!

And when he does, I'd like to think that **Plas**'s creator, Jack Cole, is somewhere up there in Comic Book Valhalla, laughing and enjoying **Plastic Man's** adventures right along with all the rest of us. He was a unique talent who created a unique hero, and they BOTH entertained millions of readers.

Aging the ALL STARS

BY PAUL LEVITZ

One of the universal constants of comics is that time stands still. Little Orphan Annie never becomes Daddy Warbucks' replacement at the head of his vast corporation, the Katzenjammer Kids never take over for the Inspector, and Batman never retires to make way for Robin. It's one of those golden rules that makes comics unique, and allows readers to be lost in the unreality. It's unthinkable to break it.

Or at least it used to be.

These days the ground rules have changed a bit. Beginning with the sixties, it began permissable to have your characters grow, develop, and even ... gasp ... age. In fact, a few writers started to consider growth and development a neccessary part of writing good comics.

All of which is by way of prologue to the statement that a part of the reason for **ALL-STAR COMICS'** continued existence is the fact that the heroes chronicled therein age before the readers' eyes. Or at least I think that's part of the reason ... with the uncountable audiences that comics attract there's no way to be sure.

It began with Julie Schwartz and Gardner Fox, of course. When they revived the **Justice Society of America** in 1963, they indicated that the team had been out of business for over a decade. And that meant that several of the members had entered into middle age.

Then the **JSA** series was revived on a regular basis, some twelve years later, and writer/editor Gerry Conway tried to make use of the fait accompli. He introduced some younger heroes, and tried to set up a level of conflict based on a heroic generation gap. He succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

Readers were already wildly enthusiastic by the time I took over as the series' regular writer, some four and a half issues later, and the same complexities that made me write the book with a scorecard at my side,were the very elements that thrilled them. Clearly, if I wanted to keep that up, I had to get the characters straight in my own head.

Each of the **JSAers** is a tremendously complex creature, you see. Their individual series were among the best of the forties, and the total number of tales they've appeared is almost beyond reckoning ... and certainly beyond reading. At least in the limited time I had available. So I had to capsulize each one's background. When that was done, I discovered a common denominator—each of their character bits was related to what the passing years had done to them. I felt like I had just adapted **Passages** to comic book form.

Take **Green Lantern**, for example. He started out as an engineer, building bridges. Then he discovered the magic lantern and started on his way to fame and fortune. Within a couple of years he was a radio star, and by the time he was into middle age he was the President of Gotham Broadcasting. He never married, because during the peak of his super-hero career he was too busy being a man about town.

When his crisis came, it totalled him.

Here's a 57 year old man, who

has put his whole life into two things: a company and a non-profit career as a super-hero. He has no family, and his only close friend is off on another planet (everybody does remember Dolby Dickles, don't they?). His company goes kaput, naturally he isn't far behind.

Paralleling what happened to **GL** is **The Flash**, in sort of a "might have been" situation. **Flash** is a little younger—maybe 55 years old—he continued with his career in science. No matter how fascinating the super-heroics got, he still put a portion of his life on the bedrock of his own talents. The Keystone Research Lab was founded about the time he got married, just after he hung up his winged boots in the fifties. There's a solid confidence to this man that few **JSAers** can match.

The third active **JSAer** from that generation of heroes is **Hawkman**, and age has treated him as kindly as it has **The Flash**. As Carter Hall he and his wife run a small private museum, and in their costumed identities they back each other up as well. But take Shiera away from him, and he collapes. They function perfectly as a team, but have grown together so much they can't function apart. Chronologically, he weighs in at 57 years . . . but the fact that he's a reincarnated Egyptian prince makes for some confusion, as well as an upcoming interesting storyline.

The rest of the original team is retired these days. **Sandman** has been inactive since the **JLA/JSA** adventure "Creature In The Velvet Cage", brooding about what do to cure Sandy. Here too age is a factor. **Sandman** was one of the first super-heroes, since he started his career in the "masked man" tradition of the thirties. Without any super-powers or similar super-stamina, Wes Dodds wouldn't be too much use in a fight today.

Hourman recently returned to action, but couldn't keep up with the changes since he was last active. He's in his sixties now, and although the Miraclo pills are strong enough to keep him super-heroic, they can't give him the patience to deal with the inevitible bickering that modern individuality causes. He also has a secure home life to retreat to. Although he married late in life, his marriage and his work in the chemicals industry give him a life beyond the **JSA.**

The Atom started his career as a college student, so he's only about 53 today by my reckoning . . . which still is a bit old to be running around if your only super-power is your strength. But it's certainly young enough to leave plenty of possibilities open, and if current plans materialize, they'll all be explored.

Batman's life history has been pretty thoroughly recounted in the last year, through the **Huntress** origin and his conflict with the **JSA**. His aging process clearly sparked both of these. His marriage to Selina Kyle, the birth of Helena, his gradual turn towards public service, Selina's death, his rejection of the **Batman** identity, and his new job as Police Commissioner after Gordon's departure all form a clear time line. And all indicate that he has been held together the whole time by his decision to turn from a

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life entirely built around being **Batman**, to one where Bruce Wayne is the dominant figure. So now, at age 60, he's gone through a lot of changes but has weathered them all.

Superman is a different case. In certain sense, he's the only one who was born to be a hero, and as such can never really retire. But just as he has adopted other conventions of life on Earth (when on Terra . . .), he has retired to the background to allow his younger cousin the spotlight. By our reckoning he's about the same age as **Batman**, but there's no real way of knowing how a superman will age.

That leaves two of the originals, and both of them fall outside the usual process of aging. For that reason, their age wasn't the key to pegging their personalities—but their antiquity was.

The Spectre is a ghost, of course, the spirit of Jim Corrigan living on in what is really Corrigan's lifeless body. While this doesn't really affect the age of either (Corrigan was about 25 when the murder took place, so he's about 62 now), but the fact that **The Spectre** is dead places him beyond the whole aging process—beyond growth. He's the absolute quantity of justice untempered by mercy, and since he's dead he can't progress to the higher state of justice **with** mercy.

On the other hand, **Doctor Fate** is ageless. He's the immortal persona of the guardian of order and life, who possesses the shell of Kent Nelson in order to function among men. The two are separate beings, even to the point of having separate speech patterns, and the strain on Nelson of having such an ethereal guest is awesome. And made all the worse by the fact that the spirit is ageless, and keeps Kent Nelson far more youthful than otherwise possible.

Kent Nelson is really hitting 60, but no one would take him for a day over 40—and **Fate's** power even extends to Inza Nelson, keeping her youthful as well. The fact that their marriage can hold up, and the two not go through breakdowns is a tribute both to their strength and to the benevolence of **Fate's** spirit. But inherent conflicts are what make the character interesting.

Curiously though, the original **JSAers** have held up better than the second group. **Johnny Thunder**, being after all an ordinary man, rarely attends even the formal meetings of the team anymore. He's finding it a little hard to be the spritely spirit of the team in his fifth decade.

Starman returned to action recently after having been laid up with a broken leg during the early part of the new **ALL-STAR** run. But Ted Knight's mind is literally in the stars, and the astronomy that was once his hobby is now a full-time occupation. He's happy with the improvements the **Star Spangled Kid** has made in the Cosmic Rod, and the **JSA** has nothing to offer him now. He's one of those people who comfortably settles into a rut with age.

Dr. Mid-Nite finds it much harder to quit. He's never let handicaps beat him (and age is at worst a handicap), and he doesn't intend to be stopped by his sixtieth birthday, either. He came back for a tour of

duty not long ago, and although the incident of **Doctor Fate's** "death" depressed him enough to make him leave again, he's still ready to jump back into action if the need arises. In the meantime, he's doing more medical innovating.

Wonder Woman also fits in the ageless category. Although she gave up her immortality when she left Paradise Island, she doesn't age at the same pace as ordinary mortals. Right now she's happy to be involved with Military Intelligence, but that's only a phase in her extraordinarily long life. Eventually she's sure to rejoin the team . . . if any of the others are still around by then.

The next group of **JSAers** are a few years younger, having joined the team after the war. **Wildcat** is the only active member of this generation, and he's just hitting 50 as these words are written. That's not an old man by any measure, but it is an age of rexamination—and all the more so for a man who has lived by violence.

Ted Grant isn't sure where his life is going, and that's what makes him a worthwhile character. Within the next year, he'll be looking for a life of his own for the first time. And that's a tough job at that age.

Mister Terrific was faced with a similar problem, but he had kept up something of a private life as Terry Sloane, playboy. He solved his problem by giving up the **Mister Terrific** identity, and turning back to his private life.

Only one other character joined the **JSA** during the Golden Age, and that was **Black Canary**. In her case, I'll accept the premise that it's a woman's privilege not to tell her age . . . especially not to someone who doesn't even write her adventures.

Pardon me. I forgot someone. Remember the original **Red Tornado**, Ma Hunkle? Well, as far as the current **ALL-STAR** run, I suggest you do exactly what I have done—forget her.

That leaves us with the second era heroes. In a certain sense, they're the most vital element. Without their counterpoint to the old team, there would be no conflict and no characterization.

Star Spangled Kid actually spans the gap between the two teams in one sense, since he began his career in 1940. But since he spent the three decades in between in limbo (see **JUSTICE LEAGUE** #100 if you don't believe me), he still feels and acts like an 18 year old. He's out of reach of his family, friends, and everything he grew up with. Sylvester Pemberton has been dead to the world all these years, and only the **Star Spangled Kid** survives—forcing him to find all his life within the **JSA**. That's what draws him irresistably towards **Power Girl**, even though he's just as incapable of understanding her as **Wildcat** is.

Robin bridges that selfsame gap in another way. He also began his career years ago, as a very young child, and being a super-hero is all he could be expected to know. However, he lucked out. A few years after he began working with **Batman**, Bruce married Selina—and that solid upbringing made him devote a portion of his energies towards the solving the world's problems on another level. So now

he's a diplomat, 35, and only gets involved with the **JSA** when they cross paths.

Power Girl has her own age related problems. Although she's 18, her last real memories are of her infancy on Krypton. She spent most of the intervening years in a time-warping starship (see **SHOWCASE** #97-99 for details), and was brought up in an imaginary universe created and run by the sentient starship. And if that kind of an upbringing wouldn't make an individual reject outside help, I don't know what would. That problem lingers on in her relationship with the other **JSAers.**

The new **Red Tornado** is also a second era member, but now that he's switched over to the **Justice League** I'll cop a plea on him as well.

That leaves only the **Huntress**, and her story has been well developed in recent months, so I won't run through it again. But contrast it with **Power Girl's** in your own mind, and I think you'll be able to see the source of some of our upcoming conflicts.

Hmm . . . I just noticed that I've been going on for several pages about why the aging process is important to **ALL-STAR** without ever addressing what started out to be the topic of this article: how to guage the age of the **ALL-STARs.**

The beginning step is to construct a time line of reality—slightly different from our own, since Earth Two is involved, but similar enough that readers can track it easily. And in the case of the **JSA** members, World War Two is the most relevant landmark.

The team divides on rather simple grounds: those active long before the war, those who began their careers during the war, and those came into the super-hero racket afterwards. This automatically puts their ages within certain brackets, since World War Two on Earth Two was virtually identical to the one we experienced—except for the multitude of super-heroic interventions.

Then the question of what the heroes were doing in their private lives enters into it. Dr. Charles McNider was already a physician, so obviously he was a good deal older than college student Al Pratt. These are the prime facts that you have to work from—thereafter it's all interpretive.

Now that you see how simple it is, you can see why I didn't spend an entire article on the subject. It's much more fascinating to use the facts to delve into the characters' heads, and make them into more realistic people. Try it with your favorite characters and see.

THE SILVER AGE OF COMICS

by **Mike Gold**

The period between the Golden Age of Comics and the Silver Age of Comics is a lot shorter than most people believe—less than four years passed between the final adventure of **The Justice Society of America** and the first adventure of a successful brand-new super-hero. But those were **some** four years—the medium was fighting for its survival, as the horror and crime comics were being chastised by do-gooders, televisions popped up in nearly every American living room, westerns and space heroes were big and the slightest suggestion of liberalism was equated with Russian conspiracy.

Comics publishers had been suffering from poor sales ever since super-heroes started waning after World War II. National Comics Publications, predecessor company to DC Comics, Inc., was in a better position than most: it had no less than six successful characters during the four year void: **Superman** and **Batman** appeared in a total of eight different magazines, **Wonder Woman** was still holding her own (although she did lose two of her three vehicles, **Sensation Comics** and **Comic Cavalcade**), **Green Arrow** and **Aquaman** were still back-up features, and **The Blackhawks**, although not super-heroes per se, were still being published with monthly regularity.

In fact, things were picking up. The **Superman** TV show slowly created a resurgance in super-hero popularity: indeed, other comics publishers unsuccessfully attempted to bring super-heroes back in 1953 and 1954. But it wasn't until the winter of 1955 that one character, as they say in the record business, "stuck to the wall."

Detective Comics #225 saw a strange teaser-line atop its logo: "Starting This Issue: Manhunter From Mars!" By today's standards, that is a failure-oriented title—there

were at least two previous costumed characters named "Manhunter" (and there would be at least three more), and some bald, half-naked midget Jolly Green Giant who hid his presence from the very world he aided isn't exactly the best concept to ever hit the four-color press.

But in 1955, super-heroes weren't a dime-a-dozen. And the concept of an extra-terrestial super-hero who could fly, see through walls and was faster than a speeding bullet was indeed a **proven** concept. More importantly, flying saucers were very "in" during the mid-1950's . . . when people weren't out building fallout shelters, they were out sighting unidentified flying objects.

Whatever the combination was, **John Jones, Manhunter from Mars** was the first successful new super-hero since the **Black Canary**—the last of the Golden Age heroes, she got her start in **Flash Comics** #86, in August 1947. In fact, the **Martian Manhunter** went on to 102 issues of **Detective Comics**, and a couple dozen issues of **House of Mystery**. He's still with us, popping up in **Adventure Comics** and in **Super-Team Family**.

This Manhunter had one **other** super-power: he could show the powers-that-be over at National the market might be ready for a new super-hero. DC had a little experimental comic called **Showcase** (recently revived!) which, at the time, was confounding readers with three truly boring concepts: **Fire Fighters, King of the Wild,** and **The Frogmen**. It was time for a little excitement. It was time for a super-hero.

The Flash was the natural choice; after all, he was the best-seller of the original non-surviving Golden Agers, and his title, **Flash Comics**, lasted longer than most of the rest. Julius Schwartz, editor of the original Speedster (and most of

the other deceased super-heroes) volunteered to put it together.

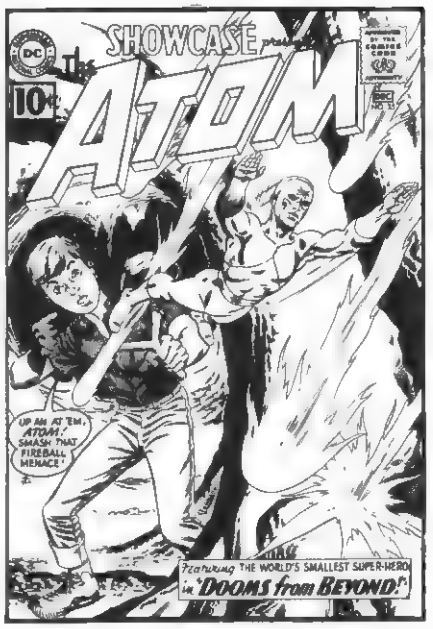
Julie picked his best talent for the job. Fellow-editor Robert Kanigher had written the original **Flash**, as well as nearly every other major and minor super-hero DC published during the 1940's; he was a natural choice as the new **Flash's** scripter. Carmine Infantino, who had pencilled the original and who was—and may very well still be—the best **designer** to churn out super-heroes—redesigned the character and developed a streamlined style that did much to influence costumed crimefighters of the next decade. Joe Kubert, known for his fantastic artwork on the Golden Age **Hawkman**, inked Infantino. The result was **Showcase** #4, September—October, 1956.

This **Flash** was not like any other super-hero. He was a scientist, and Editor Schwartz made sure there was a plausible scientific explanation for all the scientific gimmicks in his stories. This generated a sense of realism, a "maybe-this-could-really-happen" feeling among the readers. More importantly, the second **Flash** was aware of the first—he used to read the comic book adventures of his predecessor!

It took a while for DC's powers-that-be to realize they had a winner. In this, history repeated itself, as DC's powers-that-be didn't know **Superman** was a big hit for quite some time. In any event, **The Flash** made four appearances in **Showcase** between the fall of 1956 and the early summer of 1958. Based on the sales of those issues (numbers 4, 8, 13 and 14, for those of you who are wont to spend the $375.00 needed to pick them up on today's market), **The Flash** was awarded his own magazine. Picking up from the original numbering in order to save postal and legal filing fees, **Flash** #105 came out around Christmas, 1958, cover-dated February—March, 1959.

The Silver Age of Comics was officially under way.

DC, and Editor Schwartz, didn't stop there. The second most popular discontinued DC hero of the forties, **Green Lantern**, was primed for **Showcase** revival, this time with veteran John Broome at the typewriter and science-fiction and western comics artist Gil Kane at the drawing board. These three gentlemen went about improving on all the weaknesses of the original character. For example, the first **Green Lantern** couldn't use his power over wood. Since this tended to overly restrict stories, the weakness was switched to the color yellow, a more visual shortcoming. The original costume, which had little green in it, was replaced with a predominently green outfit. The

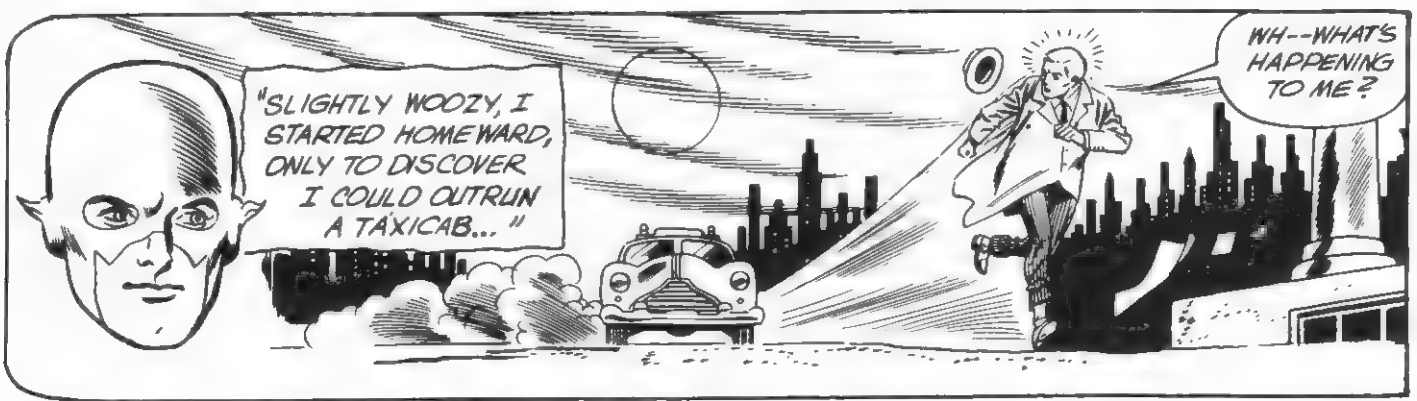


alter-ego was one who already was a hero—a test pilot with nerves of steel and the will-power to match.

The only element from the classic super-hero mold in the new **Green Lantern** was the hero's relationship with his girl friend. Carol Ferris, his boss (a nice switch), fell in love with **Green Lantern** and dismissed alter-ego Hal Jordon as "less exciting."

Where the new **Flash** had a rare stroke of continuity consciousness, the new **Green Lantern** stories had a sense of humor. When power-ringing through a wall to capture his first bad guys, the Green Gladiator startles his prey. "Wh-what's that? It ain't a bird," the first villain remarks. "It ain't a plane!" the second one retorts. "And it sure ain't **Superman**!" the third baddie responds, "Whoever he is, he's not paying us a friendly visit! Shoot him down!"

Green Lantern made his way through **Showcase** numbers 22, 23



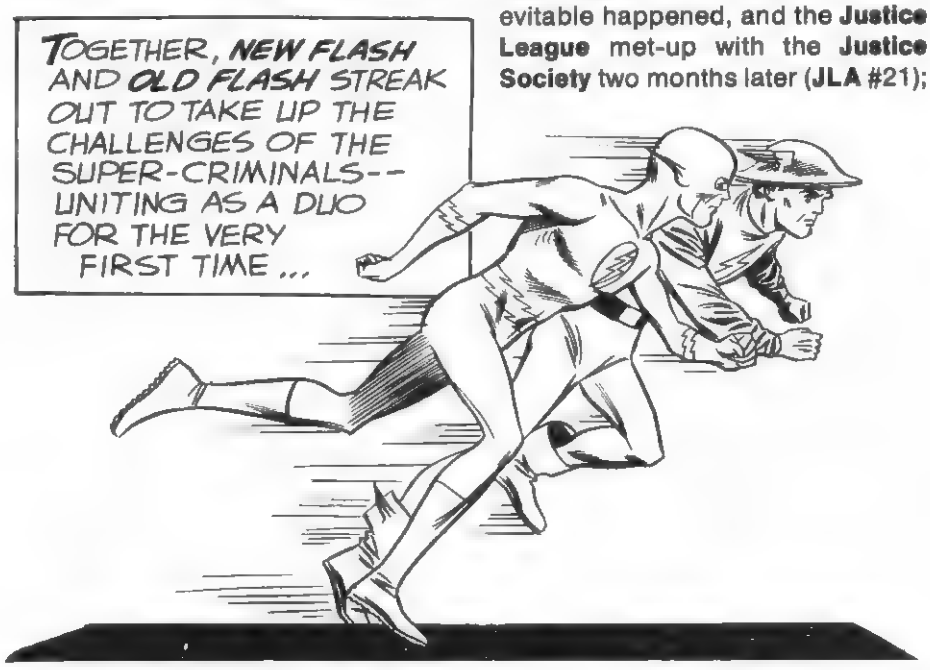
and 24; he was awarded his own title six months after the try-outs, in August of 1960.

With two successes under his belt, Schwartz pulled out all the stops the very month after the final **Showcase Green Lantern**. He took both of his creations and combined them with DC's other extant super-heroes into his third revival, **The Justice League of America**, patterned after the aforementioned **Justice Society**. They tried-out in **Brave and the Bold** numbers 28, 29 and 30 (February—March through June—July 1960), and they received their own title a mere three months later! **Superman** and **Batman** did not play an active role in the initial **J.L.A.** adventures, as they failed to play such a role during all but one of the **Justice Society** stories during the 1940's. Julie didn't edit them, and they were by now holding down nine different titles—one of which had them in their **own** team—so it was decided to give the other characters the needed exposure. Nonetheless, Schwartz was swamped with a ton of mail and the **World's Finest** heroes rapidly took a more active role.

The next two revivals were a bit more risky. **Hawkman** never had his own title during the 40's, and he really didn't change very much during his second incarnation. Granted, the stories were a bit more atmospheric, and were far more tightly plotted, but the essential costume, powers, and modus operandi were the same. One big difference—this **Hawkman** was **married** to his **Hawkgirl**; something of a first among super-heroes. Gardner Fox, who created the original Winged Wonder, and Joe Kubert, who illustrated most of the last three years of the original, turned out the six try-out issues (**Brave and the Bold** numbers 34, 35, 36, 42, 43 and 44); when he graduated to a short run in **Mystery in Space**, Murphy Anderson replaced the combat-story-happy Kubert at the drawing board. By April—May 1964, **Hawkman** had his own comic.

The Atom was the fifth revival, but he was a revival in name only. The original was merely short; if he had any power, it was his hardly super-normal strength. **The Atom** that appeared in **Showcase** #34 (September—October 1961) could actually shrink to the size of an atom—smaller, if need be. His costume had no relation to the original—Schwartz, along with writer Fox and artists Kane and Anderson, created this super-hero out of whole cloth. After three consecutive issues of **Showcase**, the Tiny Titan had a mere five-month wait to his own title.

A digression. **Showcase** #34 had a biography of the original **Atom**, along with a picture of the **Justice Society**. Younger fans, including this writer, flipped out with this personal contact with the past. Our taste-buds were merely whetted for more of the original Golden Age. We didn't have to wait long.


TOGETHER, NEW FLASH AND OLD FLASH STREAK OUT TO TAKE UP THE CHALLENGES OF THE SUPER-CRIMINALS--UNITING AS A DUO FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME...

Julie Schwartz offered up more in the way of Golden Age heroes, but he changed course a bit. Instead of reviving old characters, he merely resurrected them. **The Spectre** came back intact, true to his origin, with a slight shift away from moralism in favor of mysticism. He ran through **Showcase** numbers 60, 61 and 64, all 1966 issues, and received his own title one year later. **Doctor Fate** and **Hourman** teamed up in **Showcase** numbers 55 and 56, and **Starman** and **Black Canary** teamed up in **Brave and the Bold** numbers 61 and 62. Both sets were published in 1965.

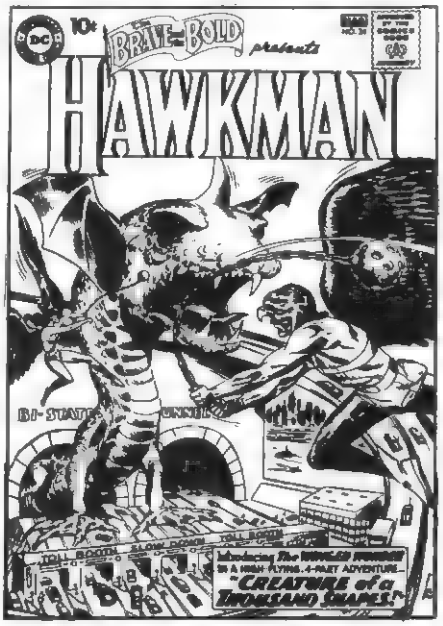
By this time, readers were familiar with the original versions of the Silver Age heroes, and their reappearances gave the Silver Age the type of reader-involvement comics never had before. The original **Flash** met his younger incarnation in **Flash** #123 (September, 1961); their second meeting (**Flash** #129, June 1962) included a **Justice Society** flashback; after they had their third meeting (**Flash** #137, June 1963), the **Justice Society** decided to get back together. Of course, the inevitable happened, and the **Justice League** met-up with the **Justice Society** two months later (**JLA** #21); the two **Green Lanterns** met-up, as did the two **Atoms** . . . and writers, editors and scores of fans have been figuring out the corresponding time paradoxes for the succeeding fifteen years.

Another part of the success of the Silver Age was that super-heroes actually met one another. It took **Superman** and **Batman** over a decade to share their first adventure outside of the **Justice Society**; it only took **The Flash** and **Green Lantern** about two years, and they periodically teamed up thereafter. **The Atom** and **Hawkman** first met in **Atom** #7, which was actually published before **Hawkman** landed his own series, and they often crossed paths after that. Even **The Spectre** met-up with the

resurrected **Wildcat** in **Spectre** #3 (March—April 1968).

One more super-hero went through major evolution under Editor Schwartz' watchful eye during the Silver Age. For some 26 years, **The Batman** had a solid fix on the number two spot in DC's super-hero roster. Yet those last several years paled in comparison to the best (which some fans place at either the early 1940's or the early 1950's). During the early 1960's, **Batman** and **Robin** faced an endless horde of monsters and space-villains; little if anything had been seen of master villains like Two-Face, Hugo Strange and the Catwoman. The Dynamic Duo were turning into dimwitted duds, and they needed relief. Enter Mr. Schwartz, Mr. Broome, Mr. Fox, Mr. Infantino and Mr. (Bob) Brown, and a whole "new look." Not a return to the Darknight Detective of the early forties—that would have to be done to repair the damage wrought by the television series—but a complete renovation.

Batman grew a couple of inches, **Robin** grew a couple of years (Infantino drew him so clean you knew he **had** to be shaving), they both grew some brains and lost square chins and Gotham City lost its Dick Tracy-ish surrealism. Enter a sense of purpose: **Batman** the detective, **Batman** the solver of insidious riddles, **Batman** the escapist from impossible traps. Enter a whole



feeling of excitement, of energy. Julie Schwartz pulled **Batman** out of the one fix from which he couldn't escape on his own power—terminal boredom!

When Julie took over **Detective Comics**, the **Martian Manhunter** (who started it all) moved over to **House of Mystery** to make room for **The Flash's** old friend, the **Elongated Man**. Inspired by **Plastic Man** but never mistaken for him, **Elongated Man** varied from the norm in two important ways: he was the only super-hero to get married (**Hawkman** came to Earth that way), and he was the only super-hero to reveal his secret identity. In that respect, he was the first super-hero to suffer from an identity crisis, for, prior to his **Detective** run, he realized he couldn't get the recognition he craved while hiding behind a mask. Being noble and true to heart, Ralph Dibny revealed his alter-ego in order to clear himself in a robbery (**Flash** #112, April—May 1960), but at that time, he was the only super-hero who was able to indulge in his ego.

The Silver Age of Comics also gave birth to something entirely different than mere super-heroes. It gave birth to comics fandom.

Back in the late 1950's, there were dozens—if not hundreds—of closet comics collectors; folks who enjoyed the Golden Age super-heroes who also picked up—and enjoyed—their Silver Age counterparts. By then, letters pages were nothing new, **Superman's**

SHOWCASE presents The SUPER-TEAM SUPREME
12
Doctor FATE and HOURMAN
MY MAGIC DOESN'T WORK ON THE EMOTION CONTROLLING MASKS OF THE PSYCHO-PIRATE!
MY SUPER-CHARGED POWERS HAVE NO EFFECT ON HIM EITHER!
"PERILS of the PSYCHO-PIRATE!"

Metropolis Mailbag having been a staple for some time, and, of course, the letters pages in the early 1950's EC Comics contributing to the very first comics oriented fanzines. But Editor Schwartz encouraged thoughtful and constructive letters by restricting his column to the most literate correspondance. It's no coincidence, then, that many of these letter-writers went on to correspond with each other ("you mean, there are more people out there like **me**?"); many of whom banded together to publish fan magazines. Jerry Bails, the father of modern fandom, was a regular in early Schwartz lettercols, as were such people as Roy Thomas, E. Nelson Bridwell, Don Thompson and Mike Friedrich. When such fanzines as **Alter-Ego** and **The Comicollector** surfaced, Julie gave them well-deserved plugs in those very same lettercols, remembering his own roots in science-fiction fandom.

When the fans got together (usually via mail) and awarded their Alley awards—often to Schwartz-edited projects—Julie humbly and dutifully reported the results. Those Alley awards made fandom a two-way street.

Julie later encouraged letterwriters by awarding original art and scripts to the writers of the best missives. These traditions led to a number of letterhacks joining the business—in addition to the aforementioned Thomas, Bridwell and Friedrich, such luminaries as Bob Rozakis, Jack C. Harris, Martin Pasko, and Irene Vartanoff first saw their names in print in a Julie Schwartz lettercolumn.

It's easy to trace the origins of the Silver Age. Each step was taken after assessing the profitability of the last—a character was not given its own title until the sales figures were in on most (if not all) of the try-out issues. DC only published about a dozen and one-half titles each month during the late 1950's, and each addition was a big step.

It's unfortunate that the end of the Silver Age isn't as clearly identifiable. Unlike the end of the Golden Age, all of the heroes of DC's Silver Age are still with us, although the comics being published today clearly differ from those of the Silver Age.

Ten years after the initial appearance of the new **Flash**, the Silver Age suffered an asthetic blow: the broadcast of the **Batman** television series. Whereas that TV show was probably the best thing that ever happened to the commercial viability of the comics medium —in plain English, super-heroes started selling through the roof— the camp element, that pathetic sense of self-depreciating humor that satirized comics of an earlier era, was what non-dedicated readers began associating with current comics fare. **Batman** himself, of course, was most directly affected, and the character was molded to fit the television image.

Beyond that, DC went through a near-complete change in editorial structure in 1968: a new editorial director in Carmine Infantino (who gave up **The Flash** and **Batman** to take the position), new editors in Joe Orlando, Joe Kubert, Dick Giordano, and Mike Sekowsky . . . new people with new ideas and fresh energy. Talent like Neal Adams, Denny O'Neil, Jim Aparo and countless others supplanted John Broome, Gardner Fox, Carmine Infantino and others. The change they brought outdistances the Silver Age.

Whereas the characters didn't

die, many titles did. **The Atom** and **Hawkman** were cancelled after healthy runs (an attempt at merging the two lasted fourteen months), **The Spectre** bit the dust after ten issues. The backlash from the **Batman** television series was so great **Justice League of America** was almost cancelled, and **Green Lantern** turned into a brilliant new title and opened the door to a new age.

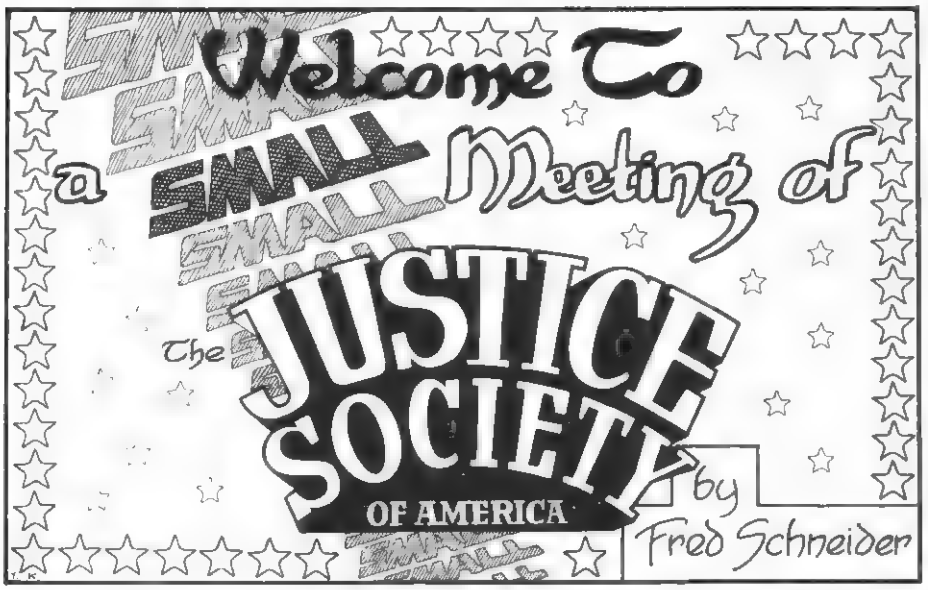
And **The Flash**, the man who started the Schwartz-age of comics, got himself married; a clear violation of the first law of superherodom: never marry the ingenue. Get engaged, meet her parents, save her from a hundred different deaths, but don't marry her. The way they made that marriage work (commercially, folks, commercially) is subject for the far-future.

It would be unfair to close out a discussion of the Silver Age of Comics without making some reference to that which followed it. As we all know, **The Batman** survived the television backlash by becoming **THE Batman**; by breaking-up with **Robin** and by returning to the Darknight Detective days of yore. Editor Schwartz streamlined **Superman** in 1970 the way he streamlined **Batman** in 1964. Jack Kirby's Fourth World series (**New Gods, Mr. Miracle**) has continued to open up new territory under divers hands, new characters like **Power Girl** and **The Huntress** have brought a new perspective to super-heroes.

And, yes, old characters have been resurrected. **Aquaman** is back, as is **The Creeper. The Doom Patrol** has been revived (in the revived **Showcase**, no less), and **Green Arrow** has gone through such a total and complete change even he wouldn't recognize the 1940's version. Even the **Justice Society** has been brought back into its own.

It's clear we're well into the third age of comics, and we've been there for perhaps nine years. We don't have a name for it—"the Bronze Age" seems cheap, and "the Platinum Age" seems to deny the pleasures of the earlier periods—but that name will come about organically, not from specific forethought.

The comics super-hero has endured for almost forty years now and has thrived for much of that time. As great as the Golden Age was, as fantastic as the Silver Age was, we ain't seen nothin' yet.



Many comic fans own copies of **All-Star** #58, the issue that heralded—if not a return to the Golden Age—at least a return to regular adventures of the members of the **Justice Society of America.** Fewer fans are lucky enough to own a copy of **All-Star** #2, that now-prized copy of the magazine which saw the first appearance of that stalwart team. But in only one place on earth is a small but impressive army of those aforesaid heroes closing ranks, and appearing in all their three-dimensional, four-color glory: my apartment! On a few shelves of a bookcase in an apartment building in downtown Brooklyn stand the members of the **JSA**—the core corps of that World War II era known to comic fans as the Golden Age.

Of course, these **JSA** figures are not living, breathing people. In fact, the tallest of them—**The Spectre**—will not be over 18 inches high when finished. That's right, "finished." For these **Justice Society** members are plastic models of the superheroes, designed and constructed by me, and found nowhere else on earth.

For a while, it was possible to purchase kits to make **Superman, Superboy, Batman, Robin, Wonder Woman,** and **The Penguin.** But these characters are insufficient in number to populate even one chapter of an **All-Star** tale; they are not known as strictly Golden Age characters, although all but **Superboy** lead dual existences on Earths I (Silver Age) and II (Golden Age); and while I have stockpiled some plastic hobby kits, they are no longer generally available.

My **Justice Society**—so far, **Jay Garrick-Flash, Al Pratt-Atom, Alan Scott-Green Lantern, Dr. Fate,** a Golden Age **Wonder Woman,** a Golden Age **Hawkman,** and a partially-complete **Spectre**—is made up of parts from many plastic model kits, additional plastic parts, and putty sculpted into shape.

In another article, one appearing in the souvenir program of the DC Super-Con of February, 1976, I described how to construct a **Green Arrow** model, one I built for a now-complete **Justice League of America** collection. For this special Golden Age issue of **AWODCC,** I will describe my efforts at building Earth II's Greatest Superheroes.

The first **J.S.A.** member I built was both a symbolic and a practical choice: **The Flash.** Since I made him out of a **Superman** model, merely leaving off the cape, he was simple, fast, and gave me the beginning of a collection. Since the **Flash's** appearance in **SHOWCASE** #4 marked the beginning of the so-called Silver Age of superheroes, and Jay Garrick's appearance in "Flash of Two Worlds" in **FLASH** #123 was the harbinger of the revival of the Golden Age characters now known as Earth II's superheroes, it was also a symbolic choice.

The differences between **Superman's** costume—pants, skin-tight boots, circular belt buckle—and the **Flash's** clothing, were obliterated with sand paper.

Those costume parts the **Flash** required—helmet, boot flaps, and wings—were constructed from plastic putty. This substance is squeezed from a tube, shaped, dries hard, and is capable of being sanded smooth.

After **Flash** must come **Green Lantern.** Here, I used the body from a **Batman** model, which seemed fitting since Alan Scott adopted his costume to strike fear into the hearts of evil-doers just as Bruce Wayne had taken the appearance of a bat for the same reason a few years earlier. I had to use **Superman's** head, since **GL's** hair, ears, and eyes show; and his cape, because **Batman's** scalloped cape was ill-suited for the Emerald Gladiator.

Again, sandpaper swept away unwanted details. Then, adding power ring, mask, power battery, and more hair, **GL** began to take shape. A major infusion of putty was necessary for construction of the high collar on his cape, and **GL**—once painted—joined his Flash-y colleague on my team.

For the Golden Age version of **Hawkman,** I elected to depict him with the yellow cowl he has sported in his latest incarnation for more than ten years, in order to distinguish him from the feather-helmeted version who is a member of Earth I's **Justice League. Batman's** head, **sans** ears, salvaged from the model used to construct **GL,** was perfect for this. I again used **Batman's** legs, finding a bent knee a perfect stance for a flying superhero's take-off. I used **Wolfman's** torso and arms, **Superman's** fists, the wings from a model of an American eagle, and built a savage battle mace from parts found at a plastics supply store. The only other difference in appearance between Earth I and II's **Hawkmen** besides their helmets is the absence of a hawk symbol on the Earth II **Hawkman's** chest emblem. Instead, he sports a red eagle prominently displayed on his yellow cowl.

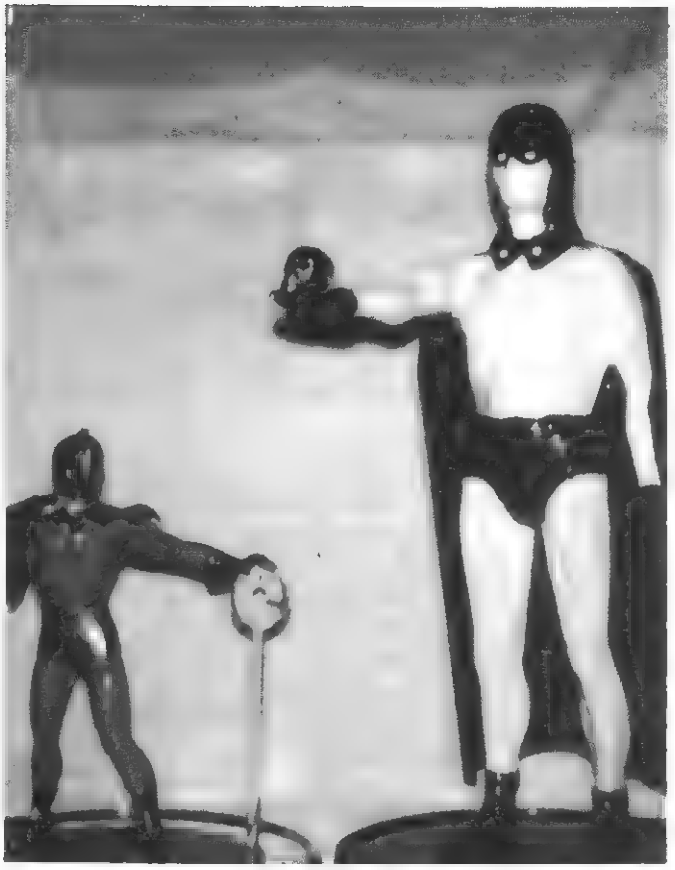
The Golden Age **Wonder Woman** was constructed

FRED SCHNIEDER PAUSES TO EXAMINE HIS WORK ON DR. MID-NITE.

almost entirely from a plastic display of a girl wearing Danskin brand leotards. I "borrowed" the magic lasso from the Aurora **Wonder Woman** kit and supplied long, dark tresses with the ubiquitous plastic putty to give the Amazon Princess her distinctive appearance. The only distinguishing feature of the Earth II character's costume is the white stripe on her boots.

Al Pratt, Earth II's Atom-ic fisted **JSA** member, is made from a **Superboy** model complete with cape, and fists taken from the **Phantom** model.

Dr. Fate has legs and boots from the same **Phantom** model; **Superman's** torso, arms, and cape; **Wolfman's** hands; and a helmeted head made from that of



the **Mummy** with gobs of plastic putty.

If there is one thing the **JSA** has that the **JLA** does not, it is a member who regularly grows to giant size. This is **the Spectre,** and to construct him, I used the big daddy of plastic models—the Visible Man. This gargantuan figure towers above his fellows, his eerie white body clothed in green boots, pants, gloves, cowl and cape.

It is a unique collection of heroes, and its membership grows. It takes me weeks to construct each one, and then only after untold days of scrapped plans and new inspirations. But while most fans are wondering where the **JSA** is between appearances in **All-Star,** I know where they are at all times: on a shelf, on my bookcase, in Brooklyn!

SPECULATIONS ON

The SPECTRE!

CHAPTER FOUR IN THE CONTINUING GUIDE TO CONFUSING CONTINUITY

BY CARY BURKETT

The Spectre ... the Ghostly Guardian ... one of the most powerful beings who ever existed ... a near—omnipotent hero with perhaps the highest calling to fight evil that any character ever had. Certainly this is an awesome subject for any writer to tackle, made even more formidable by the number of incarnations the Grim Ghost has gone through in his colorful career.

Before we attempt to weave together the threads that make up the rich tapestry of **The Spectre's** story, a brief recap of his origin is in order.

MORE FUN COMICS #52 introduced **The Spectre** in February of 1942. In the first story, police detective Jim Corrigan is killed by the "Gat" Benson gang in revenge for Corrigan's action against the mob. However, in the next world, a mysterious, mystic Voice informed Corrigan that his work on earth was not yet finished, and he was returned to earth as a supernatural entity with tremendous powers ... **THE SPECTRE!**

Two years after his first appearance, **The Spectre** was given permission to raise Corrigan's body back to life, and a strange double existance began. **The Spectre** inhabited the living body of Corrigan, but when the Ghostly Guardian was needed, he would leave that body to defeat whatever evil threatened. Corrigan and **The Spectre** co-existed in the same body, each with knowledge that the other possessed, but each with an individual existance separate from the other. In fact, for about two years, at the end of his run in **More**

Fun, The Spectre and his alter ego went their separate ways. This separation is important to remember as we formulate the hypothesis to clear up seeming inconsistancies in **The Spectre** Saga.

The Spectre was one of the charter members of the **Justice Society of America**, which obviously places him on the Earth II plane of existance. The Earth I/Earth II dimension concept is fairly well known, so I won't go into that here.

It has been surmised that the Earth I counterpart of **The Spectre** is **Deadman**, a logical choice in my opinion, since both characters have incredibly confused continuity problems. Besides, I prefer to believe that there is only ONE **Spectre**, and this is the premise I will use in this article.

We are going to concern ourselves exclusively with **The Spectre** after his revival in 1966, shortly after the **J.S.A.** came out of retirement. In **SHOWCASE** #60 of that year, we find that the Ghostly Guradian has been imprisoned in Corrigan's body for some 20 odd years due to the presence of a powerful evil entity known as Azmodus. Azmodus has also been imprisoned in **HIS** host body, because of **The Spectre's** presence. The two, in effect, cancelled each other out. The Grim Ghost is released from Corrigan's body only when Azmodus' host body dies. **The Spectre** then defeats Azmodus and removes him from the earth. He is now free to move at will into and out of Jim Corrigan's body, and the stage is set for future **Spectre** adventures.

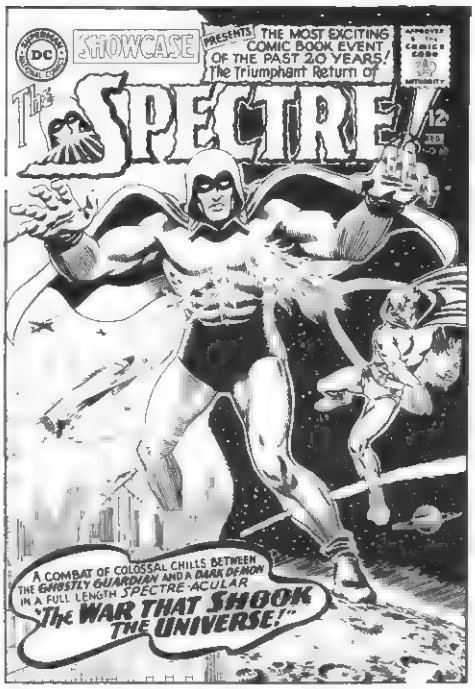
One may wonder why there was such a revival of heroes during this period of time on Earth II. It's my personal theory that the mysterious Voice, the Guiding Force behind **The Spectre**, was responsible for this. Aware that great evil forces would soon begin to manifest themselves on **ALL** the earths, this Guiding Force set in motion certain events which would cause heroes to arise ... heroes to help defend the universe from these evil forces. This Voice brought about such things as the first trip of **The Flash** to Earth II, which played a part in inspiring the **J.S.A.** to come out of retirement. It was only a matter of time before the Voice would call upon his greatest deputy of good

. . . **The Spectre.** Thus the universe would have defenders when such evil forces as Apokolips, Ares, and other powerful evil forces began to turn their attention to the earth. This had already begun to happen on Earth I, and heroes had been prepared there already.

The Spectre appeared three more times in 1966, in **SHOWCASE** #61 and 64, and in **J.L.A.** #46-47. His next appearance was in 1967, in **BRAVE & BOLD** #72. With **The Flash** of Earth I. No continuity problems yet; it is explicitly stated on page two, panel one, that **The Flash** is visiting Earth II at this time. There is one misprint, a minor one. The story says that Flash is visiting in Central City of Earth II, when he is actually visiting Gateway City, where **The Spectre** "lived".

The year 1967 was the one that saw **The Spectre** appear in his own magazine. This ran for ten issues with no major continuity errors.

In between **SPECTRE** #1 and #2, the Grim Ghost appeared in **BRAVE & BOLD** #75 with **BATMAN** of Earth I. Here we have a seeming problem. Jim Corrigan is visiting Gotham City to study police methods, and Commissioner Gordon is showing him around. But why would Corrigan go to Earth I to study police methods? And why would Gordon know him? Some might say that this is **The Spectre** of Earth I, but our hypothesis is that there is only One Spectre, the being on Earth II.


SHOWCASE
PRESENTS THE MOST EXCITING COMIC BOOK EVENT OF THE PAST 20 YEARS! The Triumphant Return of
The SPECTRE
12
A COMBAT OF COLOSSAL CHILLS BETWEEN THE GHOSTLY GUARDIAN AND A DARK DEMON IN A FULL LENGTH SPECTRE-ACULAR
"The WAR THAT SHOOK THE UNIVERSE!"

There really is no problem here when we consider the events that took place in the story and **The Spectre's** vast powers. An evil supernatural forces was rising on Earth I in the form Shan-Zi, the Oriental River-Lord. It is likely that the Guiding Force behind **The Spectre** was aware of this developing evil, and knew that **The Spectre** would be needed there. **The Spectre** took Corrigan with him to Earth I, and altered the memories of the people there, so that they falsely remembered Corrigan as a police detective of Earth I. We know that **The Spectre** has the power to manipulate the memories of others as evidenced in **J.L.A.** #124, when he made the people of THREE earths forget that members of the **J.S.A.** had been killed and brought back to life.

So the Ghostly Guardian pulled his memory trick to insure that Corrigan could be in the right place at the right time, unhampered by police department red tape. But why did **The Spectre** go to all that trouble to get Corrigan there? Why didn't he simply come to Earth I alone? The answer is that **The Spectre needed** Corrigan's body there to provide a resting place for him in case his supernatural energies became depleted.

This is made clearer in **Spectre** #8, Jan. 1969. A quote from **The Spectre** on page seven, panel one goes, "Been away from my alter ego too long! I am beginning to feel the strain . . . and fatigue! Must replenish my estrength in Jim's body — **Immediately!**" What happens next in the story is very important to later details of our theory. **The Spectre** attempts to enter Jim's body, but Corrigan won't let him until the Ghost rescues him from a gang of hoods who have cornered the detective. Angered, exhausted from **lack of contact with his host's physical body, The Spectre** reacts rashly, without thinking, and in subduing the crooks with a blast of energy, also strikes down an innocent passerby.

It seem clear that being away from contact with Corrigan for a long time affects **The Spectre** much as lack of sleep affects humans. He becomes irritable, harsh, and his judgment is blurred. It then becomes clear why he would take Corrigan to Earth I in the aforementioned **B&B** #75, since he knew there was an impending battle there.

For his irresponsibility in overcoming the crooks in such a harsh manner, **The Spectre** is called before the mysterious Voice again, and is given a weakness as punishment. This weakness was not specified, but it was stated that the weakness would become apparent only during times of stress.

From this action we learn a little about the Personality behind the Voice. This Guiding Force is shown to be concerned not only with the defeat of evil, but with the **manner** in which evil is defeated. The end does not justify the means to this Voice. It seems that the powers of **The Spectre** are similar to the powers of the ring in Tolkein's masterful trilogy, **The Lord of the Rings**. Through the ring could have been used to destroy the evil of the Dark Lord, Sauron, to do so would have employed evil to defeat evil, and the result would be merely that one evil was substituted for another. The second evil might be disguised, but it would nonetheless be evil. This is important, because it is a lesson **The Spectre**

The SPECTRE
12
A BOOK-LENGTH SPECTRE-ACULAR
"BEYOND THE SINISTER BARRIER"
THEY FOUGHT for POSSESSION of EARTH - with EARTH ITSELF as the WEAPON!

I CAN'T WASTE TIME ARGUING WITH YOU! I'M GOING TO TAKE MY REST WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT...
HUH? CAN'T PENETRATE...
ZOOING
YOU'RE WEAK, SPEC! AND I HAVE ENOUGH WILL POWER TO KEEP YOU OUT TILL YOU SURRENDER TO ME...OR THE LAW!

would have trouble learning. **SPECTRE** #8 was the first attempt of the Guiding Force to teach the Ghost this lesson with the addition of the weakness. But the attempt did not succeed.

In the very next issue, #9, **The Spectre** is again called up before the Voice, this time for taking the life of a criminal. The Voice stated, "You have abused your powers by deeming yourself the personal judge of life and death . . . no single creature may hold this unto himself!" **The Spectre** was put on probation, as it were, and given a "Journal of Judgment" full of cases that he was to review and judge on his own. This must have been a training period for **The Spectre**, so that the Ghostly Guardian could learn the difference between vengeance and justice.

In **SPECTRE** #10, we seen stories detailing this learning process of the Spirit-Sleuth.

The next appearances of **The Spectre** are in **J.L.A.** #82—83, and present strange new problems to the continuity of the Grim Ghost. In #82 we see that Earth I and Earth II are on the verge of being destroyed by being drawn into each other . . . an action begun by the alien, **Creator 2**. A gathering of the **J.S.A.** is called on Earth II to discuss the problem, and **The Spectre** is present. Obviously he has been relieved of his Judgment tasks for this emergency. However, in the next issue, #83, **Dr. Fate** summons the Ghost from a **crypt**, and a footnote to this states, "The reason **The Spectre** abides in crypt may not be related now . . . rest assured that the story is fearsome indeed!" Whatever this fearsome story is, it must have taken place between #82 and #83 of the J.L.A.!

We must indulge in more speculation to explain this. In **J.L.A.** #82, the gathering of the **Justice Society** brought no answers to the crisis facing them. Impatient, **Starman** left abruptly to see what he could find out on his own. It seems likely that his exit could have triggered similar exits by other **J.S.A.** members to investigate the situation. **The Spectre** could have sensed that the answer to the mystery involved Earth I, and determined to go there. First, however, he paid a visit to the grave of his long-dead girl-friend of the 1940's, Clarice Winston. Some believe that Corrigan even married Clarice after the Spectre was imprisoned in his body, and this is entirely possible. Be that as it may, **The Spectre** did feel a great deal of affection for Clarice, and visited the grave before leaving for Earth I. So this grave-site was the point of transition **The Spectre** used to cross the dimensions into the other earth.

While on Earth I, the Ghostly Guardian must have run into a powerful evil force. Perhaps he encountered Darkseid and the minions of Apokolips, who were even then seeking the Anti-Life Equation. If anyone possessed this equation, certainly **The Spectre** would be one of Darkseid's prime suspects. The battle must have been a fierce one, with The Spectre barely giving his foes a temporary set-back. Greatly weakened the Grim Ghost returned to Earth II at the point he left it, Clarice Winston's grave.

Unknown to **The Spectre**, however, the spiritual slaves of the evil goddess **Kali** had followed him across the gulf separating the dimensions, and attacked the weakened Ghost at the grave site.

The grave itself exerted a weakening force upon **The Spectre**. It drew the Spectre's thoughts to Clarice's eternal rest, and made him long to take his own rest beside her. He began to think that a defeat by these evil spirits would not be so bad if it gave him the opportunity to be free of his duties. Because of this lack of resolve in **The Spectre's** part, the Guiding Force allowed the Ghost to be defeated by the spirits, who were able to imprison **The Spectre** in Clarice's crypt. The strong pull that the Spirit-Sleuth felt for the grave made this an easy task.

However, these evil spirits did not possess the power to make the imprisonment permanent . . . **The Spectre** could be freed by the summons of a powerful sorcerer. After the evil spirits returned to Earth I, the Ghostly Guardian realized that he had made another error in judgement. Through spiritual telepathy, **The Spectre** informed **Dr. Fate** of **HIS** fate, and the good doctor freed him as we saw in **J.L.A.** #83. If this seems like too much activity to have taken place between issues, we must remember that **The Spectre** has the power to **stop time from passing around him,** as he did in **SHOWCASE** #60 and various other places. So his battles could have occured in literally no time at all!

In the rest of the issue, we see **The Spectre** seemingly give up his

existence to save earths I and II. But can a Ghost really die?

Evidently, the Grim Ghost had not completed his purpose for existing, and his Guiding Force drew his atoms back together to fulfill his duties. His first mission after his new resurrection was to defeat the minions of the evil goddess Kali, who had imprisoned him in the crypt. These evil spirits were back on earth I, so this is where we next see **The Spectre** in **BRAVE & BOLD** #166.

We also see Jim Corrigan here, but from the context of the story, it is obvious that this is not the **true** Corrigan. The true Corrigan is not actually **The Spectre**, merely the host body that **The Spectre** inhabits. In **BRAVE & BOLD** #116, this Corrigan is one and the same as the Spectre, vanishing when the Ghost appears. So we must conjecture that this Corrigan is but a solid illusion that **The Spectre** uses as a disguise. We assume that the real Corrigan is still on Earth II, living a normal life without **The Spectre**.

So the Ghostly Guardian is not in contact with his host body. We've already discussed what results when this happens, and it is evident in **B&B** #116. **The Spectre** exhibits a harsher, fiercer attitude than any other time except when he was absent from Corrigan's body for too long a period.

Batman and the Spirit-Sleuth defeat the minions of Kali, but it is obvious that The Spectre needs a more graphic lesson to learn what the Voice has tried to teach him before about misuse of his powers. Here we come to **The Spectre** series that ran through **ADVENTURE COMICS** #431 to 440.

ADVENTURE #435 gives us a clue as to where these exploits take place. In this story everyone seems to know **Superman's** secret identity is Clark Kent. This eliminates Earths I and II as the location, and points to a third earth ... Earth **Prime**, where there are **no** real super-heroes, only comic books which publish "fictional" accounts of such heroes as **Superman, Batman, Flash** and others. We first learned of the existence of this earth in **FLASH** #179. Here everyone **does** know Superman's identity!

It is our conjecture that the Voice moved **The Spectre** to Earth Prime (or a similar Earth where **Superman** is a comic hero) during this series, for the express purpose of teaching **The Spectre** in a vivid way what comes when great power is used the wrong way. In the **ADVENTURE** stories, **The Spectre** is an extremely harsh entity, dispensing not justice, but a kind of grisly vengeance with no regard for human life. Part of this is because the Ghostly Guardian is not in contact with his host body ... he is still maintaining the solid illusion of Corrigan.

The Guilding Force allowed this kind of activity so that **The Spectre** could learn first-hand than when justice is administered with such harsh ferocity, it becomes akin to the evil it punishes. It seems likely that the end of the training period occured when Corrigan was given a **new** life in issue #439, only to have it snuffed out by gangsters in the next issue. This shock must have jarred **The Spectre** into the realization of how he had been acting, and accomplished the lesson that he needed to learn. His training over, he was allowed to return to his real home on Earth II.

His trip from Earth-Prime to Earth II had one unforseen side-effect. It briefly opened up a rift between the two dimensions ... a rift through which two young writers named Cary Bates and Elliot Maggin traveled in **J.L.A.** #123, with the aid of a cosmic treadmill. I conjecture this because in **J.L.A.** #124 we see that **The Spectre** is indeed back on Earth II, and the trip he made from Earth-Prime to Earth II must have been about the same time as the journey of the two writers.

We end then, where we began; **The Spectre** is back on Earth II, and is once again the wise, merciful, **good** entity of old.

Will **The Spectre** return again at some future date? Most assuredly. For as **Green Arrow** said in the closing panel of **J.L.A.** #83, "... Somewhere, somehow, the **Ghostly Guardian lives!** He's too **strong**—too **noble**—to die! We'll hear from him again—count on it!"

THE LEGION OUTPOST

JACK C. HARRIS

CLASSIFIED REPORT
Disclosure of any portion of this report to unauthorized personel is strictly forbidden according to Legion Directive THX-1138.

How can the most dangerous villain ever encountered by *The Legion Of Super-Heroes* be an individual that we are not even sure exists? Although we have battled him face to face on numerous occations, his very nature makes us uncertain if the fights really took place in the realm we call reality. Did we actually meet and defeat him? Should he be included in the *history* of *The Legion*—or its *future?* How can one classify someone who can bend and manipulate the very fabric of time? Just who—or what—is ... *The Time Trapper?*

Since we of *The Legion* live and exist in a well-defined stream of time, we must relate events pertaining to *The Time Trapper's* attacks upon us in the sequential order experienced by our various members, in the order in which we discovered them. At first, some of the incidents were not known to have been caused by the actions of this evil villain until well after the various reports were filed. We have re-filed the reports in order now and they are noted for easy reference. The first report was submitted by *Kal-El* of Krypton (*Superboy*) and *Lar Gand* of Daxam (*Mon-El*):

TIME REPORT
Updated: File under: **THE TIME TRAPPER**
Earth Prime/20th Century reference: **Adventure Comics** #314, Nov., '63 & #317, Feb., '64.

Although we both have the power to travel through the time barrier (flying clock-wise at ultra-light speed for the future, counter clock-wise for the past), we have have not been able to pierce the barrier for more than 30 days in to the future. There is a forcefield, an **Iron Curtain of Time** that seals off the future from us. We are carrying

on our own investigation into this phenomenon and will keep **The Legion** abreast of all information to this potentially dangerous situation. **—Superboy & Mon-El.**

This following update was filed a few weeks later:

TIME REPORT
(The Time Trapper)
Earth Prime/20th Century reference: **Adventure Comics** #321, Jun., 1964.

With the aid of **Jo Nah** of Rimbor (**Ultra Boy**), we have determined that a super-scientific criminal calling himself **The Time Trapper** has successfully sealed off the future from us! We are still unable to go more than 30 days from the present moment into the future. We have received an ultimatum from **The Trapper** that declares he will soon invade the 30th century and destroy **The Legion—Superboy & Mon-El.**

I learned of this report later. At the time it was being filed, I was on the planet Graa building a radar beacon to aid the local space navigators. It was there that I was trapped temporarily and an attempt was made to force me to reveal the secret of *The Legion's* greatest weapon, the Concentrator, a device that can direct all the power of the universe at one time! I learned later that other *Legionnares* were also attacked for the same reason. But the secret of our most awesome weapon was kept safe by each member. Some members were confronted by Commissioner Wilson of the Science Police, who said he feared the secret of the Concentrator falling into the wrong hands. He tested various members of the Legion on the planet Althar. *Garth Ranzz* filed the next report on those incidents of Althar:
Earth Prime/20th Century reference: **Adventure Comics** #321, Jun., 1964.

Fearing that some **Legionnare** would crack under the strain of torture by unscrupulous persons,

Commissioner Wilson of the Science Police transported **The Legionnaires** to the planet Althar for rigorous testing. Any **Legionnaire** who failed the testing was to be placed in solitary on the planet for fear that he or she would leak the terrible secret of the **Concentrator**. As we were each tested, I noticed that Commissioner Wilson spoke of the importance of defeating the urge to tell. As he began testing me, he spoke of **Chameleon Boy's** confrontation on the planet Graa (see **Reep Daggle's** report on the incident). Since we had never mentioned **Cham's** escape to the Commissioner, and no report had yet been filed with the Science Police, I was sure that this "Commissioner" was an imposter. In fact, since he knew the details of **Cham's** escape, it was clearly he who had trapped **Chameleon Boy** and this whole testing was a sham used to learn the secret of the Concentrator.

I fooled the phony Commissioner by pretending to break under pressure and told him that a **Legion** experiment in creating matter (that had failed) was the secret of the Concentrator. After he left to try that experiment, **Superboy** tracked him down with his super-vision and we learned that the Commissioner was **The Time Trapper** himself in disguise! Ironically, we had to bring the power of the Concentrator into play at this point and were forced to allow **The Trapper** to escape through his **Iron Curtain of Time** once more.

The Concentrator, that most deadly weapon, remains a **Legion** secret!—**Lightning Lad**

It was some months later (subjective time) that we once again encountered *The Time Trapper*. By this time he had acquired or created (it is not clear which) the *Hourglass of Evolution Doom* that would revert whomever touched it back down through their youth, infancy and finally into a blob of protoplasm. He dispatched the evil *Glorith* of Baaldur through his *Iron Curtain of Time* and back to the 30th century. This cunning beauty's mission was to subject the weird effects of the hourglass on *The Legionnaires*.

The report on this incident was filed by then-leader, *Queri Dox:*

Earth Prime/20th century reference: **Adventure Comics** #338, Nov., 1965.

. . . because of the unusual effects of a chemical spray, the **Hourglass of Evolution Doom** only partially effected **The Legionnaires** exposed to its force. Instead of being reverted to blobs, their rapid de-aging halted at infancy. Their power remained intact and they were subsequently kidnapped by **The Time Trapper** and Glorith since they were at such a trusting and innocent age. **The Trapper** hoped to keep their confidence while their mental facilities were at their lowest. Luckily, **Saturn Girl's** extra sensory powers were not dimmed in the least and she easily sensed the evil of **The Trapper**.

When confronted by **Superboy** and myself, **The Trapper** bargained with the restoration of the captured **Legionnaires**. I had noticed that "baby" **Star Boy** had innocently taken **The Time Trapper's** device that enabled the villain to pass through his **Iron Curtain of Time**. Knowing he no longer had it, I made a bargain that, if the **Legion** members were returned to their normal physical and mental ages, **Superboy** would repair his ship and we would leave him. We did our part and our comrades were returned as we knew them. We held up our part of the bargain with one slight addition: We encased his ship in an **Iron Curtain of Time**. Being without his device, **The Trapper** was himself trapped!—**Brainiac 5.**

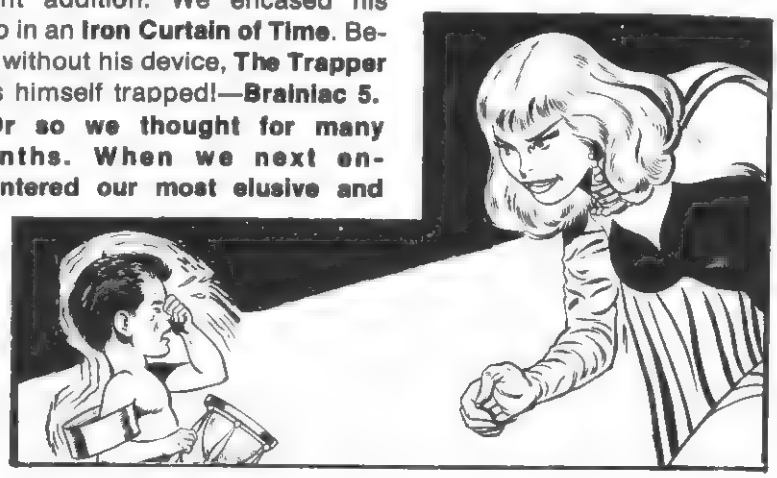
Or so we thought for many months. When we next encountered our most elusive and mysterious foe, we learned one of his most baffling secrets: the *reason* for his burning desire to destroy The Legion. The following report (the latest official document) was filed by *Irma Ardeen:*

TIME TRAPPER REPORT/update TT-3

Earth Prime/20th century reference: **Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes** #223, Jan., 1977.

In our latest and weirdest enounter with the villain calling himself **The Time Trapper, Superboy, Karate Kid, Chameleon Boy, Sun Boy** and myself were transported to an area of "no time" —presumably the home or headquarters of **The Time Trapper**. It was there we learned for the first time the reason he has been attacking **The Legion** for so many months. According to his time computers, in the many possible futures, the only one in which he will rule the universe is a future where the five members mentioned at the beginning of this report do not exist!

It was **The Trapper's** plan to kill us himself therefore insuring our non-existance and the possibility of him conquring the universe. He seemed to be able to predict our every move and have us completely off guard until I was able to determine that were were in a "no time" area. **The Trapper** was fighting us all simultaneously! By mentally stimulating Superboy's memory, we were able to realize that **The Trapper** was using a new hourglass weapon to effect the time bending neccessary for the "no time" field. **Superboy** destroyed it and were



returned to the normal time stream. **The Trapper** fell into a red sun, but we are still not certain if he is alive or dead!—**Saturn Girl.**

After all these encounters with *The Trapper*, we have learned very little about him. He is obviously very intelligent and we suspect him to be a scientist by profession. He always wears a burgandy robe that hides his features completely. We have seen his hands and feet, but he always wears boots and his hands have been colored red, white and flesh at various times making it difficult to determine what race and/or planet he originates from. His hideouts we have learned about have often been in the future making some of us suspect his is from some distant future time.

It is also theorized that since he bends time, the attacks that reported by The *Legion* may not have happened in the order we suppose. Some suspect that the last attack (Earth Prime Reference: *S/LSH* 223) was his first, and the others came later—an attempt by *The Trapper* to prevent his defeat by changing the past.

Our study of him has also netted us results in ancient history. *The Trapper* was encountered by *Superman* in the 20th Century. The report here (paraphrased from *Superman's* own diary) was transcribed by *Superman* scholar *Laurel Kent:*

SUPERMAN DIARY/Transcribed for **The Legion of Super-Heroes.** Earth Prime reference: **Action Comics** #'s 385-7, Feb.-Apr., 1970.

"I really don't know if my latest adventure should really be placed in my diary since I am not certain it really happened! It's all too incredible. But since even now the memory is dimming, I feel I must record it . . .

"Because of delicate government experiments, I was not able to pierce the time barrier in my normal manner when summoned to the year 101,970 A.D. I used a faulty **Legion** time bubble that caused me to age over 100,000 years when I arrived! My invulnerability saved me, but I was unable to go back in time to rectify the situation! I could only move forward—ageing as I went along . . .

"After visiting many future ages and societies (such as one that arrested me for using my powers and sentenced me to a home for aged super-heroes), I traveled so far into the future that I discovered the planet earth to be nothing but a dead hulk of matter about to be destroyed by "Cosmic junk men"! I actually re-built the earth and re-peopled it with primitives from another planet! I felt it my ultimate achievement . . .

"I never knew for certain, but I believe that the inability to go backwards in time was a similar effect as one I encountered as **Superboy** while I was on a mission with the **Legion of Super-Heroes** in

Adventure
COMICS
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12¢
FEATURING
MATTER-EATER LAD, ULTRA BOY, LIGHT LASS (AND PRACTICALLY THE WHOLE LEGION GANG)
in "The MENACE of the SINISTER SUPER-BABIES!"
THOSE LEGIONNAIRES HAVE BEEN CHANGED INTO INFANTS! THEY THINK THIS BANK IS A PLAYGROUND! AND I'M TRAPPED BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN OF TIME!
The SHOWDOWN with THE TIME TRAPPER EVERYONE'S BEEN WAITING FOR!

the 30th century. It was called the **Iron Curtain of Time** and it was created by the villain called **The Time Trapper.** I will always suspect that he was behind my plight . . .

"I kept on moving into the future until I discovered that time does travel in a circle and I found myself back to normal and standing in the exact spot and time from which I had originally left . . .

"Dream or illusion? I don't know . . . and I probably never will . . ."

***Laurel Kent* adds a footnote that the 20th century heroine *Wonder Woman* also encountered a burgandy-robed villain using time tricks and calling himself *The Time Master*. We have no way of telling whether this was *The Trapper* in another guise or reality. The Earth Prime/20th Century Reference is *Wonder Woman* #101, Oct., 1958 (reprinted in *WW* #217, May, 1975).**

We end this report with no definite conclusions. We hope *The Trapper* is forever gone. But with his uncanny ability to travel backwards and forwards from yesterday to tomorrow, there is no way of ever being prepared for his next attack upon the *Legion of Super-Heroes!—Reep Daggle (Chameleon Boy)*/report submitted for Earth Prime/20th century record/*AWODCC* #16.

* * * * *

Added note: This is **Nura Nal** of Naltor speaking. In my identity of **Dream Girl**, I aid **The Legion** in prediciting future events so they can be forwarned. As you probably know, my dreams **ALWAYS** come true and it is this power that qualifies me as a **Legionnare**.

My latest dream has told me that **The Time Trapper's** origin will soon be revealed in an all-new collector's edition of **Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes**! Don't dare miss it!—**Dream Girl!**

* * * * *

Brianiac 5 here again, gang. Did you attempt to figure out the problem in deductive reasoning I gave you last time? Well, as promised, here are the answers to who was where fighting who:

Element Lad defeated **Dr. Regulus** on the planet Braal, **Cosmic Boy** managed to over come **Mordru** on Trom, **Dream Girl** used cunning trickery to foil **Cosmic King** on Daxam and **Mon-El** captured the **Emerald Empress** on the planet Naltor.

* * * * *

Next: **The Legion Outpost** present new and exciting features about your favorite teens of the far-flung future. Don't miss it! And **Long Live the Legion!**

Amazing World of Letters

BOB ROZAKIS

Our plea for your comments in AWODCC #15 hasn't had time to reach you as we go to press, but we do have a beginning, and we know you're already planning to send us a letter on this issue! Right? Anyway, on to the mail . . .

Gentlemen:

AMAZING WORLD #14 is undoubtedly my favorite ish yet, since **JUSTICE LEAGUE** is probably my favorite **DC** title. The retrospective frontispiece was informative for new readers, a trivia expert's dream, and an excellent refresher for someone like me who has followed the **JLA** since **BRAVE AND BOLD #28**, lo those many years ago.

The second article was interesting because it allowed us to look into the heads of the various writers who have handled the **JLA**. I admit that I enjoy the characterization of the members currently being shown in **JLA**, but I wish you would resolve the **Atom**/Jean Loring thing from **SUPER-TEAM FAMILY** and marry them off, so the Tiny Titan could better relate with other married heroes, like **The Flash**.

The **JLA** Index (I'm a sucker for these things) answered one of my fondest wishes, completing the index done way back in **JLA #39**. Now I suggest a chronological cover gallery.

The Organization article was interesting and I especially liked the way the Wayne Foundation is funding the **JLA**. And though it does parallel Anthony Stark funding the **Avengers** for Marvel, isn't that one of the things that makes parallel worlds parallel?

Like indexes, I'm also crazy about headquarters diagrams. The mountain layout was much easier to visualize than the satellite.

But my favorite feature was the capsule history of each **JLA**er, especially naming the states in which each city is. I've always suspected that **The Flash** operated out of Ohio, but I never suspected that **Hawkman** called Michigan his home state. And you've finally solved the Gotham City/Metropolis /New York problem by placing Gotham in New Jersey and Metropolis in Delaware (though I never would have guessed it!)

With regard to the Direct Currents section, why not hold off writing that news until just before the magazine is due at the printer's, thus getting the news as up-to-date as possible? The info on the 1978 calendar was a step in the right direction, but you neglected to say when it would be available.

ROBERT KOWALSKI
12600 McDougall
Detroit, MI 48212

(By the time you read this, the calendar will be on sale in book stores, stationery stores and any other stores that normally sell calendars. Don't miss out on picking up a copy!

The Direct Currents section has been eliminated from AWODCC, being replaced by our weekly Daily Planet pages in most of our magazines, and by the new DC monthly newsletter to which you can subscribe. (See the ads in our magazines.) That way,the issues of AWODCC do not become outdated before they come back from the printer!

The placement of the various super-hero home towns in states is something that is still hotly debated here at DC, most notably by Senior Editor Julie Schwartz and Associate Editor Nelson Bridwell. It was ENB who assigned "statehood" to the various cities, despite Julie's objections that Metropolis was not in Delaware and that Gotham is right across the river from Manhattan in "Gotham State". (As readers of BATMAN FAMILY know, Barbara (Batgirl) Gordon is a Congresswoman from Gotham, not New Jersey!) Julie contends that Gotham, Metropolis and New York are all in the same general area, existing on Earth-One where we have no major cities on Earth-Prime, on land which is not part of any particular state . . . except that of imagination.

And by the way, Ivy Town has been described as being near Boston, while Star City was placed near Hartford, putting the former in Massachusetts and the latter in Connecticut—the opposite of the way it was listed in AWODCC #14! —BR)

Dear Woodchucks,

Does anyone there remember **PHANTOM STRANGER #41**? You do? Good, then perhaps you would refer to the letters page therein which promised an **AWODCC** story featuring various origins of **PS** as hypothesized by the various writers who handled the book. It's almost two years later and still no sign of that story. Can we expect it soon? Or ever?

STEPHEN DORIS
607 Sixth Street
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266

(The Phantom Stranger comes and goes as he pleases . . . and evidently, so does the article about his "roots". Whether it will ever show up is something to be answered by AWODCC editor Cary Burkett or the Stranger himself, but certainly not by—Bob Rozakis)

THE GREAT SUPERMAN MOVIE CONTEST

by
Mike Gold

Creating a contest is similar to plotting a comic book story. In the case of **The Great Superman Movie Contest**, Sol Harrison and I sat in his office and kicked around ideas. Instead of writing a plot synopsis, I employed the basic communications devise of Business Americana—the inter-office memo. Pages and pages of them.

Further meeting and brainstorming sessions. We knew we could get two people in a scene of the movie without difficulty. Should we have second and third prizes? What could we give out as additional prizes anyway?

Sol, in his patented matter-of-fact delivery, suggested we offer up to 5,000 second prizes. No third prizes, no runners up, just two first prizes and 5,000 second prizes.

I mentally computed the postage costs on 5,002 winners. Given a minimum of two mailing, DC could probably pay the editorial costs of one whole comic book on the contest's postage budget alone.

After discussing our progress with Jenette, and upon the approval of the final memo, we decided upon the following scam:

We would print the appropriate letters to spell out "Superman," "Kal-El" and "Clark" in all of our comics. Contestants would only have to gather enough letters to spell out "Superman" and either one of the other two words; we would run each different letter in between three and six comics published during a two month period.

To let the readers know of the contest, we'd run a blurb on the covers of those books. We'd also run the rules on one of our advertising pages, guaranteeing it to be in all the books published those two months.

We'd then hold a drawing, and the man who plays **Superman** in the movie, 24 year-old actor Christopher Reeve, would select the two first prize winners from those eligible entries.

Terrific. It sounds like it could work.

At which point, we run straight into your proverbial brick walls.

The domestic filming was scheduled to wind up in August. In order for it to be fair, we'd have to run the contest during the books on sale in May and June, cut-off entries in mid-July, hold the drawing immediately and give the winners some two-three weeks notice. That sounds logical, right?

Well, it just so happens that between the time we agreed upon the contest format and the time the May on-sale books closed, we had about five days to put together the blurbs and coupons, write and layout the rules and get them approved by our legal department.

All the May covers were already designed. Most had already come in, so they had to be taken apart for the "You can be in the Superman Movie" blurb. One or two covers (and all the Dollar Comics covers) could not be redesigned to carry the blurb. For weeks, whenever I came within ten feet of our production department, I was met with looks of outright hatred ("Pull apart 40 covers? It can't be done," Production Manager Jack Nothing-Is-Impossible Adler told me—right before his team started pulling apart those 40 covers).

We decided to put the letter-coupons on the letters-pages, in place of those taglines promoting various books. There is a whole set of May taglines designed by yours-truly and executed by Bill Morse that collectors will never get to see—we pulled them out of the books at the last moment.

Getting the contest rules in the books was a bit easier. We had an ad prepared for the **Batman Vs. Ra's Al Ghul** tabloid that had run the previous month and was scheduled for reprinting. It was pulled.

All we had to do now was wait for our legal department to approve the rules.

Now the legal department of Warner Publishing does a lot of things. They oversee all contracts—the paperback outfit, for example, had signed some guy named Nixon to do a book—and they deal with lawsuits, copyright and trademark issues, the ramifications of new policies and directions . . . in other words, they have more things to worry about than some movie contest. They approved the rules about ninety seconds before we had to ship the artwork to the engraver.

The rules, therefore, had to be set in type on an office typewriter. We usually try to have these things typeset, but, like I said, we had about ninety seconds.

That phase completed, we then had to alert the distribution system. We designed stickers and posters (called "window-streamers" in the trade) and did the usual print run for such a project—something in the neighborhood of 10,000 pieces. They went to the field representatives of the distributor (Independent News Company, another division of DC's daddy, Warner Communications) for distribution to a fraction of the quarter-million plus outlets that handle magazines.

Lo and behold, the stores loved the contest! We went back to press a couple of times, grinding out more stickers and window-streamers, to the point where we ran out of yellow stock. The last several thousand had to be run on ordinary white stock.

It was physically impossible for anybody to accumulate the necessary letters to enter the contest before early June, unless the would-be contestant bought his comics at a store which received them early. In the beginning of that month, a couple of letters began to trickle in—maybe five or ten a day. The vast majority followed the rules correctly and were eligible for the drawing.

Then the second week came around. We immediately shifted from a trickle to an avalanche. Now even the mailroom folks stopped talking to me. Every day brought in at least 100 entries, and I was quickly outdrawing all our editors in the number of pieces of mail received each day. Considering Julie Schwartz edits **Superman, Batman, Flash, Green Lantern** and **Justice League**, that's really saying something.

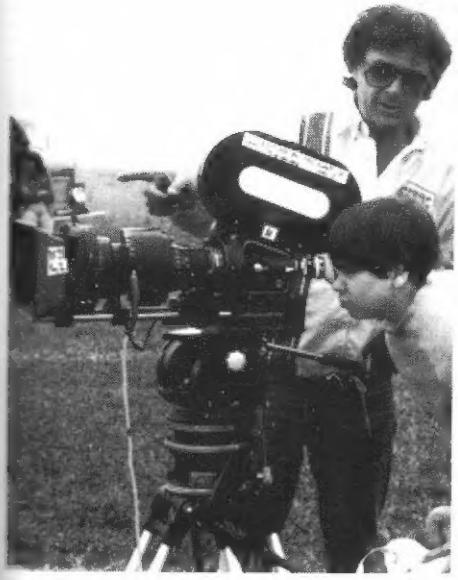
Towards July 15th, my office began to resemble the North Pole a week before Christmas. Mail was stuffed into my file cabinets piled on the floor . . . I made the mistake of taking a couple days off, and I had to dig past the mail to get into my office.

July 14th, 1977. The day before the mail cut-off date and not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. You see, the night before, New York City was hit with the second Great Blackout, and Mayor Abe Beame told everybody to stay home—including the postal workers. We extended the deadline through July 19th, to allow the post office and the mailroom to catch up. Oddly enough, we continued receiving bushels of mail right through the 19th, but in the week since then, we've only received 34 entries.

Most of the mail came in under a 13¢ stamp (12¢ if from Canada). A few came in from abroad, which sent us back to our rules, checking to see if we would have to fly them into the U.S. should they win (we would, but they didn't—we lucked out on that one).

Some of the mail came in special delivery, and a bit

ED FINNERAN GETS A LESSON IN CAMERA-WORK FROM DIRECTOR RICHARD DONNER.



TIM HUSSEY AND ED FINNERAN MEET KIRK ALYN AND NOEL NEILL, WHO WILL PLAY LOIS LANE'S PARENTS IN THE UPCOMING SUPERMAN MOVIE. KIRK AND NOEL WERE THE VERY FIRST ACTORS TO PORTRAY SUPERMAN AND LOIS LANE ON THE SCREEN.

of it came registered. Much of it came decorated—amateur drawings of **Superman**, paste-ups of the **Superman** logo and the like. It's amazing the work some of the contestants went through.

On Wednesday, July 20th, 1977, we had our drawing. Chris Reeve met us at the offices of the movie's public relations outfit, some three blocks away, so Editor Jack C. Harris and I had to haul all that mail over—no mean trick, as the outside temperature was in excess of 100 degrees.

Joining Sol Harrison, Jenette Kahn and Cary Bates at the p.r. firm, we only had a couple of minutes wait for the photographer to show up (a photographer is necessary to immortalize the event; otherwise, this particular article would be visually boring). We spent that time with Chris Reeve, clowning round and generally having a good time.

(No, Chris isn't afraid of heights; yes, he's having fun playing The Man of Steel but he doesn't like working out in the 100 degree-plus weather—in fact, when he heard George Reeve's costume was padded, he thought he might have an out to hold-off on the workouts.)

Photographer Bob Penn—who shot the stills for **The Spy Who Loved Me, A Bridge Too Far, The Omen,** and others—showed up, and the official drawing was about to begin.

It took three people—Chris, Jack and myself—to lift the box containing the entries. **Superman** could have done it with one blow from his super-lungs. We dropped the letters on the large conference-room table, and Sol and Jenette helped Chris mix them up.

Then, with eyes tightly closed, Chris groped around and pulled out two envelopes, one at a time. He handed one to Jenette, the other to Sol.

As fate would have it, both entries were missing letters! We tried again.

Entries from **Tim Hussey**, of San Lorenzo, California, and **Ed Finneran**, of Springfield, Massachusetts, were pulled out of the pile. Both had the coupons needed to win. We had our winners!

CONTEST WINNERS ED FINNERAN AND TIM HUSSEY

TIM HUSSEY FINDS THAT AN ACTOR MUST MAKE SACRIFICES FOR HIS ROLE

Chris had to rejoin the movie crew, so he left (via the front door, not via window) and the rest of us returned to DC's offices to change the lives of two young men.

Needless to say, both winners were excited. Tim is 13 years old, and a **Batman** fan. Ed is 14, and a faithful follower of the **Justice League of America.**

By the time you read this, both Tim and Ed will have spent a couple of days in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, being fitted for costumes, having their hair arranged properly and being made-up. They will have appeared in a sequence in Smallville wherein Young Clark Kent realizes the responsibilities of his powers.

After their work in Canada, our winners—plus one of each winner's parents—will have flown to New York for a tour of DC's offices and a short stay in The Big Apple.

Meanwhile, the other x-thousand entries (we never did have time to count them all) are being checked out for second prize eligibility. Up to 5,000 people will receive subscriptions to **The Amazing World of DC Comics**, copies of **The Secret Origins of the DC Super-Heroes**, various upcoming oversize books (**Superman vs. Muhammad Ali** and others), or a few other, as yet undecided, prizes.

Congratulations, Tim and Ed. I think we at DC have had almost as much fun selecting you as you've had appearing in the movie.

We thank all the entrants in **The Great Superman Movie Contest**, even the folks who didn't win a prize. We'll do another contest soon (like, in a year or two); maybe you'll win then.

And, just in case there's a reader out there who isn't aware of the **Superman** movie, let me tell you it is expected to be released in the summer of 1978, and it stars Marlon Brando as Jor-El, Gene Hackman as Lex Luthor, Margot Kidder as Lois Lane, and Jackie Cooper, Ned Beatty, Glenn Ford, Trevor Howard, Valerie Perrine and Terence Stamp in featured roles, and introduces Christopher Reeve as Clark Kent. If it's half as much fun as this contest was, it will be one dynamite movie.